Homework in English language teaching – Hong Kong primary English

language teachers' beliefs and practices

Submitted by Benjamin Luke Moorhouse to the University of Exeter as a thesis

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Abstract

Homework is an important practice commonly expected of teachers in schools worldwide. However, teachers' homework practices are not well understood. This study develops our understanding of English language homework as experienced by primary school English language teachers in Hong Kong, specifically teachers' homework practices, beliefs regarding homework's utility as a teaching and learning tool, and sociocultural and contextual influences on these practices and beliefs. A two-stage mixed-method research design was employed which generated qualitative and quantitative data. In the first stage, 279 English language primary school teachers working in aided or government primary schools in Hong Kong were surveyed. The second stage involved in-depth interviews with 11 teachers and the collection of homework samples. Homework was found to be a universal practice of all the participants. They assigned various kinds of homework for various purposes while devoting a significant amount of time to homework-related activities. Participants strongly believed in the benefits of homework as a teaching and learning tool. They provided characteristics of homework practices and activities, which they believe to be effective. However, they did not always see their current homework practices as effective. Such practices were often standardised within a school, with teachers teaching the same grade being required to give the same homework as their colleagues. The data suggests, this standardisation of practices appears to be due to sociocultural and contextual influences, including school policies, parents' expectations and cultural norms. This standardisation can limit teachers' ability to develop homework practices that meet the needs of their learners. By developing a conceptual framework, this study adds to the growing understanding of the pedagogical practice of homework within the Hong Kong context.

Acknowledgements

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my daughter, Brianne. All the energy I expend on my work and research is directed at bettering the educational experience of our next generation and the work environment of our teachers, to whom we entrust society's most important citizens. With the arrival of my own child, this mission has become even more personal and important to me.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

APSM	Assistant primary-school Mistress/Master
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BEd	Bachelor of Education
CDC	Curriculum Development Institute
CHC	Confucian Heritage Culture
CM	Certificate Master
DSE	Diploma of Secondary Education
DSS	Direct Subsidy School
EDB	Education Bureau
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EMB	Education and Manpower Bureau
ESF	English School Foundation
ESL	English as a second language
GM	Graduate Master
HKEAA	Hong Kong Examination and Assessment Authority
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PGDE	Postgraduate Diploma of Education
PS1	Pre-Secondary One Attainment Test
PSM	Primary School Mistress/Master
SAR	Special administrative region
SCMP	South China Morning Post
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TESL	Teaching English as a Second Language
TESOL	Teaching English to speakers of other languages
TSA	Territory-wide system assessment

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I have long been interested in the homework practices of primary school English language teachers. It has puzzled me that teachers seem to expect so much from young English language learners outside of the classroom, and yet we seem to know little regarding the benefits of homework or even teachers' rationale and reasons for setting homework (Cooper, 2001; Hallam, 2006; Rudman, 2014). Indeed, homework is an important and commonly expected practice of teachers in schools worldwide (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2014). However, the homework practices of teachers are not well understood.

While homework is rarely a topic of formal research, in the media and society, homework is a frequent topic of discussion and debate. It is common to see articles and opinion pieces in newspapers arguing both for and against the practice of assigning homework. In Hong Kong, these discussions seem to have become more common in recent years, particularly in relation to homework in Hong Kong's primary schools, which have been criticised as excessive by parent groups and lawmakers (Liu, 2018).

One comment on an anti-Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA) Facebook group reveals the frustration one parent has felt:

> It's an inhumane way to live … [the children] go to school, do their homework after school, continue doing their homework after dinner, prepare for tests, go to bed, and the next day it repeats all over again.
>
> The system forces the school to put pressure on teachers, the

teachers put pressure on the parents, the parents put pressure on

the children, and it's an endless loop … the TSA should be cancelled!

No more students should kill themselves because of school pressure!

Please let them have a happy childhood and have time to play! (Joe

Wong Ting-ting, comment on Anti-TSA Facebook group, quoted in

Cheung (2015)

A search for the word 'homework' in the online version of the South China

Morning Post (SCMP) (A Hong Kong English-language daily newspaper)

between 15 January 2015 and 6 February 2018 returns 4230 results.[1] Of these,

957 included the keyword 'primary', suggesting that nearly a quarter of all

homework-related articles discuss the homework issued to younger students and

pointing to the substantial social interest in the issue. Some recent articles

include:

- 'Hong Kong education chief calls for less homework during Lunar New

  Year' (Chiu, 2018)

- 'Lawmakers demand cap on homework set for Hong Kong primary school

  pupils' (Liu, 2018)

- 'How a Hong Kong primary school pupil's homework load has put a strain

  on family life' (McGuire, 2016)

- 'Hong Kong primary pupils face more homework than secondary students,

  according to survey' (Ng, 2015)

Just by scanning the titles above, we can see that most of the articles focus on

the quantity of homework and the impact this can have on learners. For example,

one article in the SCMP reported on a survey jointly conducted by the Boys and

Girls Association, the Professional Teachers' Union and the Graduate

Association of the College of Education, which found that 'a primary schoolchild

has to spend an average [of] 2.38 hours every day on schoolwork at home, compared to 2.22 hours for Form Four or Five students (Form Four students are aged between 14 and 15, while Form Five students are between 15–16 years old.) (Ng, 2015). Similar findings have emerged from other research on the amount of time Hong Kong primary school students are spending on homework every day (Tam & Chan, 2010, 2011). Yet, in my seven years of teaching in Hong Kong primary schools, rarely was the practice of assigning homework mentioned within the schools themselves. Both the practice and its benefits seemed to be taken for granted (Vatterott, 2009).

While the media seems to be interested in homework, academics have given little attention to English language homework at the primary level (Moorhouse, 2018a, 2018b). To date, the majority of researchers studying English language education have been concerned with teachers' practices and student learning in the classroom (Nunan & Richards, 2015) rather than the impact of their practices outside of the classroom.

 This has left gaps in our understanding of the pedagogical practice of assigning homework that must be filled (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Farrell & Danby, 2015; Hallam, 2006; Rudman, 2014; Vatterott, 2009; Wiesenthal, Cooper, Greenblatt, & Marcus, 1997). The failure to address this subject in research may be partly due to the difficulties inherent in conducting studies on homework (Cooper, 2001; Hallam, 2006; Trautwein & Ludtke, 2009; Vatterott, 2009). As Hallam (2006, p. 2) notes, 'There are considerable methodological problems in undertaking research on the effects of homework'. A substantial number of variables must be taken into account in research on homework, including

educational contexts, students' socio-economic status, parental involvement, cultural factors, and the quantity and quality of homework assigned. Furthermore, it can be hard to connect homework and student achievement. Vatterott (2009) suggests that 'it is hard to separate when the effect of classroom teaching ends and the effect of homework begins' (p. 57). In addition, homework tends to be conducted out of teachers' and researchers' sight. The research that has been done has often relied on self-reporting of parents', students' and teachers' homework habits without involving other forms of data collection, such as the collection of samples of assigned homework, which can be logistically challenging. No study can give conclusive proof of the benefits or drawbacks of homework, nor will this study try to do so.

It is important to explore teachers' beliefs about homework as these can affect their practices and impact on the beliefs of their learners (Borg, 2003; Medwell & Wray, 2018). It is also important to explore homework within the context of English language teaching and learning, as little is known about teachers' practices, even when many of us know that the assignment of homework is a common feature of English language teaching (Chang, Wall, Tare, Golonka, & Vatz, 2014; North & Pillay, 2002) that is often taken for granted (Painter, 2004; Moorhouse, 2017; Harmer, 2015).

Against this background and in light of the limited empirical research conducted on homework in English language teaching or at the primary level in different contexts (Chang, et al., 2014; Medwell & Wray, 2018; Moorhouse, 2018a; Rudman, 2014), this study examines the practices and beliefs of Hong Kong primary English language teachers while exploring the factors influencing these

practices and beliefs. The aim of the study is to add to our knowledge about the practice of homework and provide us with greater insight into this practice, which is common throughout schools globally (OECD, 2014) yet remains under-researched at the primary level (Rudman, 2014; Medwell & Wray, 2018), particularly within the field of English language education, which has paid little attention to it (Chang et al., 2014; Moorhouse, 2017, 2018a; North & Pillay, 2002).

1.1 Professional Relevance

For more than seven years, I worked as an English language teacher in two Hong Kong aided primary schools. Thereafter, I changed jobs and became an advisory teacher with the Education Bureau (EDB) in Hong Kong. In both of these roles, I saw students and teachers seemingly burdened with the amount of homework and marking they had to contend with. I saw teachers setting one or two pieces of homework per day without coordinating with other subject teachers about how much homework would be assigned for each of the classes they taught. This led students to take home 6–10 pieces of homework home each night, with 50–100 pieces of completed homework landing on each teacher's desk the next day. I witnessed first-hand the conflicts between teachers and students regarding incomplete or substandard homework. I often heard a loud collective sigh when the teacher wrote the homework assignment on the board, followed the next morning by teachers scolding students for not doing it correctly or at all. This put both students and teachers in a negative state of mind before the formal school day had even begun (Moorhouse, 2016).

These homework practices are not new, as evidenced by the suicide note left by a 10-year-old boy (Primary Five), reprinted in the SCMP on 11 May 1991 and quoted in Adamson & Morris (1998):

> Everyday [sic], there is a lot of homework. It is not only in large quantity, but also difficult to do. Each recess lasts only 10 min. If there is an extra holiday, then I am given 10 more pieces of homework. Especially during long vacation, the homework piles up. There is no day to relax. Dictation, quizzes, and examinations become more frequent. Even after midnight I am still doing and revising homework. Usually, I can't go to bed until 1 o'clock. Then, at 6:50 in the morning, I have to get up again. I am so tired. I don't want any more study. (p. 194)

These practices seemed to have visible effects on students' motivation and interest towards schooling and the learning of various subjects, including English. I felt they saw it as a chore that had to be completed and something that had to be practised in order to pass a test, rather than a language with a real communicative purpose. It seemed that these practices were contributing to students' development of a 'want-hate relationship with English' (Lin, 1999, p. 394): They know that they need it in order to pass examinations and progress though the education system; however, they hate learning it.

Added to this is the amount of class time taken up by assigning homework and providing feedback. My observations revealed that a substantial amount of time was expended on homework-related matters, such as setting homework, explaining tasks, writing homework in the homework diary, checking that

homework was handed in, giving feedback to students on their homework, correcting homework and returning homework to students.

In my current role as a teacher educator working with pre-service and in-service English language teachers, I often hear my students complaining that they have little time for planning due to the homework they need to mark.

With so much emphasis and time spent on homework, I felt it is important to examine current practices in the context of English language teaching in Hong Kong, as well as teachers' beliefs about the effectiveness of homework as a learning tool and the factors affecting these practices and beliefs in order to help provide a better understanding of this phenomenon.

1.2 Defining 'Homework'

Before reviewing the literature on homework, it is important to establish a clear definition of the term. Homework has been defined as 'tasks assigned to students by school teachers that are meant to be carried out during non-school hours' (Cooper, 1989, p. 86). This definition includes any assignments, whether requiring written or non-written responses, that were assigned at school and intended to be completed outside of school hours, even if in fact completed during school breaks, in class teacher periods or in other class time (Cooper, 2001; Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006). It excludes in-school tutoring, assignments set outside of formal education (e.g., by tutoring centres) and extra-curricular activities (e.g., sports). This definition of homework has been chosen as it is the most widely accepted definition in homework research and will allow for easier comparison with other research in the field (Cooper, 1989; 2001; Copper, et al.,

2006; Cooper & Valentine, 2001; Rudman, 2014; Medwell & Wray, 2018; Moorhouse, 2018a, 2018b; Tam, 2009; Tam & Chan, 2010; Wiesenthal et al., 1997).

Although this is the most common definition of 'homework' in academic literature, it does not account for all the complexities of the practice. Indeed, 'there is tremendous variety in its practices, in the type and amount of work assigned, where and when it is completed (with or without parental involvement), and whether or not it is graded by teachers' (Coutts, 2004, pp. 182–183).

There could be differences of opinion between teachers, parents and students over what constitutes homework. While students may believe that work such as piano practice, set outside of the formal school context, is homework, it falls outside of the scope of the definition above. Teachers may believe that work completed in school but not done during regular lessons (possible in after-school tutoring clubs or in class teacher periods) is homework, even though they never intended for it to be done at home. Such work would also fall outside of the scope of our definition. These differences will be considered throughout the research, with the definition being clarified when necessary.

1.3 Research Questions

This is an exploratory study utilising a mixed-methods approach aligned with the interpretive paradigm focusing on the homework practices and beliefs of primary school English language teachers working in government or aided schools in Hong Kong. It can be considered an exploratory study, as the literature shows a clear lack of research in this area. Therefore, this study hopes to reveal new

insights and understandings to add to the field (Cuthill, 2002). The study will provide a better perspective on teachers' practices and beliefs, supported by relevant methodological choices. In order to do this, the following research questions are posed:

- RQ1: What are Hong Kong primary English language teachers' homework practices?

- RQ2: What beliefs do English language teachers have regarding assigning homework to young English language learners?

- RQ3: What factors affect English language teachers' practices and beliefs?

RQ1 examines the homework practices of teachers. As little is known about subject-specific teachers' practices at the primary level (Chang et al., 2014; Rudman, 2014), such an investigation will shed more light on the matter. It will also provide context to the other research questions: We need to know *what* teachers are doing before we can find out *why* they are doing it.

RQ2 investigates teachers' beliefs regarding homework. Research on teachers' beliefs has shown that they can have an important impact on teachers' practices (Borg, 2001; Farrell & Bennis, 2013; Lee, 2009). Moreover, beliefs may also cause teachers to challenge practices or policies that do not accord with those beliefs or may cause teachers to feel that they lack the autonomy necessary to realise their beliefs (Benson, 2000, 2010). It is therefore important for us to gain a better understanding of these beliefs in relation to homework, a question that has not received adequate research attention to date (Medwell & Wray, 2018).

RQ3 explores the external factors that influence teachers' homework practices as well as their beliefs regarding homework. A number of factors related to teachers' work environments, education and childhood have been shown to affect their practices and beliefs (Borg, 2001, 2003; Knowles, 1992; Pajares, 1992). These factors can 'hinder language teachers' ability to adopt practices which reflect their beliefs' (Borg, 2003, p. 94). Often, teachers believe these contextual factors to be beyond their control (Johnson, 1994; Richards & Pennington, 1998). An exploration of these influences can provide us with a better, more holistic understanding of the homework phenomenon.

Taken together, the three research questions aim to provide greater insight into the complex dynamics between practices, beliefs and influences that have led to the prevailing homework situation in English language education in Hong Kong primary schools. To answer these questions, a two-stage research design was developed. The first stage included a survey, which primarily addressed RQ1 and RQ2. The second stage involved interviews and the collection of sample homework assignments from the interviewees and was aimed at addressing RQ3. During the interviews, a number of insights regarding RQ1 and RQ2 emerged that are discussed in detail below. The study's methodology will be described in detail in Chapter 4.

1.4 Summary

In this introductory chapter, I provided the rationale for exploring the homework practices and beliefs of English language teachers working in primary schools in Hong Kong. In Chapter 2, I describe the Hong Kong education system with an emphasis on primary English language teaching and the context in which the

research is situated. Hong Kong Education Bureau policies regarding homework are also described. In Chapter 3, I review the regional and international literature concerning homework, including homework practices, teachers' beliefs regarding homework and the factors affecting teachers' homework practices and beliefs. In Chapter 4, I describe the study's methodology, data collection methods, data analysis methods and ethical considerations. In Chapter 5, I present the findings to the research questions. In Chapter 6, the findings, as conceptualised in Figure 5, are discussed in relation to the research questions, Hong Kong sociocultural context and research literature. In Chapter 7, I consider the study's contribution to knowledge and pedagogical implications, concluding with recommendations for various stakeholders and a call for further research while acknowledging the limitations of the study in scope and design.

CHAPTER TWO: THE HONG KONG EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Hong Kong was a British colony from 1842 to 1997, when it became a special administrative region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China. During its time under British rule, Hong Kong grew from a small fishing village into a city of over 7 million people, 93.6% of which are of Chinese descent (Pong & Chow, 2002). This history has had a marked impact on the status of the English language and on the education system in Hong Kong compared to other parts of China (Pong & Chow, 2002; Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2015).

As a special administrative region, Hong Kong has a high degree of autonomy over its political and judicial systems under the principal of 'one country, two systems', as stated in the Sino-British Joint Declaration (1984). This system and the rights of Hong Kong citizens are protected by the 'Basic Law', Hong Kong's de facto constitution. Chapter 6 of the Basic Law, which refers specifically to education, states that the government of Hong Kong shall 'formulate policies on the development and improvement of education' (Article 136) and that 'educational institutions of all kinds may retain their autonomy and enjoy academic freedom' (Article 137). This makes the system different from that in operation in the rest of Greater China.

In this chapter, the position and status of English in Hong Kong with particulary emphasis on English language education will be explored. This is followed by a detailed examination of the Hong Kong education system, including primary schools in Hong Kong, the curriculum, subject specialist teachers, the culture,

language policy and teacher autonomy. The chapter concludes with an overview of EDB policies regarding homework.

2.1 The English Language in Hong Kong

To the occasional visitor or tourist, Hong Kong appears to be a genuinely bilingual or even trilingual city: street signs and menus are in English and standard written Chinese, Mass Transit Railway announcements are in English, Cantonese and Putonghua, while most staff in service industries seem to switch between languages effortlessly. This gives the impression that Chinese and English sit harmoniously together as if it has always been this way. However, in reality, the language situation and indeed the role of English and need for learning English are much more complicated. In this section, I will provide an overview of languages in Hong Kong with a focus on English, followed by a discussion on the language learning aims of English learners in Hong Kong and the English language teaching priorities.

Today, Chinese and English are both official languages in Hong Kong. However, for the majority of the colonial period English was the sole official language. In 1974, Chinese was added as a co-official language in response to civil unrest and government reforms aimed at localising the administration of Hong Kong (Poon, 2010). Although not clearly defined, Chinese in Hong Kong has been understood as spoken Cantonese, rather than Putonghua, the main variety of Chinese spoken in the People's Republic of China (or Mainland China) and Taiwan, and written standard Chinese (two writing systems are used to represent written Chinese – traditional (used in Taiwan and Hong Kong) and simplified (used in Mainland China)).

Despite its legal status as an official language, English has never been the primary language spoken by the general population (Poon, 2010). This is due to the vast majority of immigrants to Hong Kong coming from Cantonese-speaking areas of southern China; 95% of the Hong Kong population is of Chinese descent (Census and Statistics Department, 2016), and the colonial government was concerned only with ensuring a small elite of local Chinese learn English (Tsui & Tomlinson, 2007). These bilingual Chinese were then able to act as 'linguistic middlemen' (Luke & Richards, 1982) connecting the large Cantonese-speaking community and the tiny English-speaking community of British colonists (Poon, 2010). Even by the English-speaking Chinese, English was used in a 'restricted manner' (Poon, 2010, p.9) for education, administration, the judiciary, business and the media, but rarely for social interaction among themselves (Evans, 2016). Luke and Richards (1982, p.55) described English not as a second language but as an 'auxiliary language'. Even today, according to the latest mid-decade bi-census, 88.1% of people report Cantonese as their mother tongue; 3.9%, Putonghua; 3.7%, other Chinese dialects; and 1.8%, English (Census and Statistics Department, 2016). Given the large number of Cantonese speakers, Cantonese is a 'major marker of local identity' (Evan, 2016, p.9), which is often used as a way to differentiate Hong Kong people from their counterparts in Mainland China.

Despite the relatively limited domains English was used in and the small percentage of speakers who consider English to be their mother tongue, English was kept an official language after the return of Hong Kong to China in 1997. The decision to keep English as an official language reflects the changing status of

English from a colonial language to an international language due to the global spread of English, as well as the changing economics in Hong Kong from a primarily manufacturing-based economy to an international business centre (Li, 2017). In this time, English came to be seen as a 'value-added language' (Li, 1999), a similar characteristic of English in other post-colonial countries (Evans 2016). The private sector wanted a highly literate and proficient workforce to ensure Hong Kong's competitive advantage, while people saw greater individual benefits to learning English.

In response to the growing desire and need for English and also the return to Chinese control in 1997, the Hong Kong government adopted the educational policy and aim to make its citizens trilingual in Cantonese, Putonghua (Mandarin) and English and biliterate in Chinese and English (Kirkpatrick, 2007). This policy aimed to enable students to graduate with a 'reasonably high level of ability to speak Cantonese, English and Putonghua, and to read and write Chinese and English' (Li, 2017, p.180).

This policy and the increased desire for learning English by the general population has led to an increase in the number of speakers of English, reflected in the growth of people who reported speaking English as an additional language from 34.9% in 1996 to 51.9% in 2016 (Census and Statistics Department, 1996; 2016). Although the number of English speakers has increased, the domains English is used for are still relatively narrow and not part of most people's daily lives. The majority of respondents to the 2016 census stated that they never or seldom use English for the following functions: 'communicating with spouse', 'communicating with children', 'communicating with parents', or 'chatting with

friends'. Only for workplace uses of English such as 'reading books/newspaper/documents/web pages' and 'sending e-mails and letters to external parties/ clients' did a majority of respondents state that they must or often/sometimes need to use written English (Census and Statistics Department, 2016).

Today, because of Hong Kong's historical past and the rise in English as an international language, the English-conversant bilingual Chinese middle class remain the 'socioeconomically dominant group in Hong Kong' and English is seen as the 'most important language of socio-mobility' (Lin, 2005, p.317). English is still the medium of instruction in most universities and post-secondary institutions in Hong Kong. This puts a high value on English, with parents seeing 'English as a gatekeeper to entering prestigious English-medium secondary schools' and universities 'as well as their child's future prosperity' (Moorhouse & Wong, 2019, p.2). In this context, parents and students often see the need for learning English for narrower, instrumental and pragmatic aims, solely to access good secondary schools, higher education and professional careers in the public and private sector (Poon, 2009).

It is important to note here that it is not easy to categorise Hong Kong as an EFL or ESL setting. As has been discussed, English is only used in limited domains; however, at the same time, these domains are prestigious while English is a co-official language. This places English in a grey area, with scholars such as Li (2017, p.183) arguing that it is indeed both an EFL and ESL setting with a 'social divide along the lines of class'. In the case of middle-class families, English may well be more like a second language, while for 'working class parents, with little

or no support for English, it is more like a foreign language' (p.184). Both ESL and EFL are used in literature to describe the position of English in Hong Kong (Carless & Wong, 2000).

2.2 The English Language in Hong Kong Education

The high value but limited role of English in society has put pressure on the government and schools to provide quality English language education. Schools are where most people acquire English (Evans, 2016) and where students sit the high-stakes examinations that determine their future success. This pressure can be seen in the various conflicts around education reforms in Hong Kong over the last 20 years regarding the medium of instruction policies (Tsui & Tollefson, 2007) and curriculum reforms (Carless, 2003; Littlewood, 2007) and the growth of a large shadow education system to supplement students' English learning (Zhan et al., 2013).

In primary schools, the conflict can be seen between the government's aims and suggestions concerning the English language curriculum and parents' and students' preferences. The English language curriculum has two broad aims (CDI, 2017, p.17):

1. To provide every student of English with further opportunities for extending their knowledge and experience of the cultures of other people as well as opportunities for personal and intellectual development, further studies, pleasure and work in the English medium.

2. 2. To enable every student to prepare for the changing socio-economic demands resulting from *advances in information technology*; these

demands include the interpretation, use and production of materials for
pleasure, study and work in the English medium.

These aims promote a holistic and communicative view of English, viewing it as
an important tool in all aspects of a person's life. To achieve these aims, the
curriculum promotes the use of communicative language teaching and task-
based learning approaches (CDI, 2004; 2017) with a focus on 'learner-
centredness', the importance of 'meaningful contexts' and 'purposeful
communication' and language learning 'connected to real life' (CDI, 2017, p.55-
56). In 1997, Hong Kong officially adopted Task-based Learning into its primary
English language curriculum (Carless, 2007).

However, teachers, parents and students have been found to prefer rote-learning
activities and a focus on reading and writing, which they believe better prepares
learners for high-stakes assessments (Carless, 2004, 2007; Cheung, 2010,
2014). Hong Kong standardised assessments, such as the Diploma of Secondary
Education, place a higher weighting on reading and writing skills compared to
listening and speaking (Cheung, 2014). This focus tends to have led to less
lesson time devoted to speaking practice or content that teachers, parents and
students feel does not prepare students for the assessments (Cheung, 2010).
This leads to certain practices such as weekly dictations, which are seen as 'a
time-honoured routine practice which has passed down the generations to help
teachers show they have discharged their duties' (Chiang, 2002, p.14). The
results of the dictation often contribute to the students' final grades and report
cards, although the words and sentences dictated come from the textbook and
are provided to students to study before they sit for the dictation (Adamson &

Davison, 2003). Thus, according to Chiang (2002), the practice is more of a test of students' memorisation rather than a tool for teaching and learning.

2.3 Primary School Education in Hong Kong

Between 1978 and 2009, all children were required to attend school for at least nine years, with the government providing six years of free primary education and three years of free secondary education (Zhan et al., 2013). In 2009, this period was extended, and free education is now offered for a total of twelve years (Information Services Department, 2017) – six years of primary education and six years of secondary education.

In the 2016/2017 school year (the year during which the data for this thesis were collected), there were 575 primary schools in Hong Kong – 532 government and aided schools and 43 English School Foundation (ESF) and other private or international schools (Education Bureau [EDB], 2018). Primary schools in Hong Kong consist of six grades. Children enter primary school between the ages of 5 snd 6 and graduate bewteen the age of 11 and 12. It is common for children to attend kindergarten for up to four years before entering primary school; however, kindergarten attendance is not mandatory. Hong Kong primary schools operate a subject-based system with classes receiving different teachers for each subject. The core primary-school subjects include English, Chinese, Mathematics, General Studies, Music, Visual Arts and Physical Education (Morris & Adamson, 2010). The average class size in primary schools has decreased over the last decade with the implementation of a small-class policy (Harfitt, 2013). Schools can apply to join the small-class scheme, which limits classes to a maximum of 27 students. Some historically prestigious schools with good reputations have

elected not to sign up to the policy and still have classes of up to 40 students (Harfitt, 2013).

Due to Hong Kong's historical context, the school system is complex, with a wide range of school and school management structures (Morris & Adamson, 2010). Schools can be separated into six main types: government schools, aided schools, Direct-subsidy schools (DSS), private schools, international schools and ESF schools (Information Services Department, 2017).

The variety of school structures in place in Hong Kong may suggest that parents and students have a wide choice of school types. In reality, however, prestigious international and private schools are highly sought after, and the tuition charged by many of these schools is out of reach of the majority of the population. This has created significant competition among students for the remaining elite government and aided schools (Morris & Adamson, 2010).

For secondary school entry, students are divided into three bands (previously five). Students in band one can gain entry into higher-banded secondary schools. These are the most sought-after schools and often teach in the medium of English. 'The Hong Kong education system is well known for being highly selective' (Pong & Chow, 2002, p. 142), with only approximately 30% of primary school graduates achieving a band one rating. This system puts schools under increased pressure to attract good students and raise grades (Morris & Adamson, 2010), with parents placing pressure on schools to raise grades and increase their children's chances of gaining entry to prestigious secondary schools (Tam & Chan, 2010). The pressure to enter a good school starts even before primary

school. It is common for parents to compete for places in prestigious kindergartens to increase their children's chances of gaining entry to better primary schools (Adamson & Morris, 1998). This is partly due to the manner in which the system is constructed, with a decline in the number of available placements at each stage of the school system. Hong Kong has eight government-funded universities that admit eighteen percent of secondary school graduates each year (Fleming, 2016). This is substantially less than the number of students who receive high enough grades in the Diploma of Secondary Education (DSE) for university entry (Fleming, 2016).

Due to the differences in curriculums and school structures between the various types of schools, this study will exclude teachers working in private, DSS, ESF and international schools. While this narrows the scope of the study, it will also help provide a clearer picture of the practices in government and aided school, which represent the majority of schools in Hong Kong (Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2015). The rest of the context section and literature review will focus on the situation in government and aided schools.

2.4 Hong Kong Government and Aided Primary School Curriculums

Government schools are funded and operated by the EDB. Aided schools are subsidised by the government but sponsored and operated by school sponsoring bodies, such as religious or charitable groups. They are administered by the Code of Aid (EMB, 1994) and must observe the regulations and policies of the EDB (Yung, 2006). Government and aided schools develop their own curriculums following the curriculum guidelines developed by the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) (Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2015). In government and aided primary

schools, the curriculum guidelines related to English language education include the *English Language Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 – Secondary 6) 2017*; *English Language Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 – Primary 6) 2004*; and *English Language Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide (P1 – S3) 2002*. Each of these documents has guidelines on homework practices that will be discussed later in this chapter.

The government produces policy documents and guidelines, and schools decide how to implement their curriculums (Adamson and Morris, 1998; Morris & Adamson, 2010). Curriculums are influenced by various stakeholders, including the CDC, the Hong Kong Examination and Assessment Authority (HKEAA), schools, school sponsors and operators, commercial publishers, teachers, students and parents. The CDC produces curriculum guidelines for each subject, including English (CDC, 2004; CDC 2014), the HKEAA decides how subjects will be examined, publishers decide whether to produce resources and how to present subjects, schools decide whether they will follow the guidelines and what resources to select, and teachers are seen as responsible for teaching the subject in the classroom (Morris & Adamson, 2010). In reality, this demarcation of responsibility, which was suggested by Morris and Adamson, is less clear, with each stakeholder influencing the others and with some stakeholders having greater influence than others.

One feature of Hong Kong primary education that differs from primary education in other contexts such as the UK, USA, Japan and Europe is that teachers are subject specialists rather than generalists (Adamson & Morris, 1998; Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2015). This means that they are educated to teach a specific subject

and then generally teach the specific subject they are qualified to teach. Usually, teachers will complete their Bachelor of Education degree (BEd) or Postgraduate Diploma of Education (PGDE) in a core subject (English, mathematics or Chinese), and then they may take a minor or be required to teach other subjects, such as Information Technology, General Studies, Music or Art. Students often receive a different teacher for each subject and may be taught by up to six different teachers each day.

This difference from other educational contexts means that research on homework practices in other contexts may not be applicable to Hong Kong primary schools, as Hong Kong primary teachers are responsible for one subject in the school curriculum, rather than all of them, as is the case in other countries. This further emphasises the importance of the current study.

2.5 Beliefs About Education in Hong Kong

This study seeks to understand teachers' beliefs about the value of homework. Therefore, it is important to explore the beliefs held by teachers and the wider society within Hong Kong, including its Confucius roots (Morris & Adamson, 2010).

East Asian societies, also known as Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHCs), such as Hong Kong, China, Japan and Korea, have often been seen to have similar cultural and educational policies and practices. The policies, practices and beliefs adopted in these societies may reflect cultural differences (Brown, Hui, Flora, & Kennedy, 2011) from the Western world. Despite Hong Kong being seen as a modern cosmopolitan city and marketed as 'Asia's World City', 'tradition is still

seen as important culturally as well as its roots in CHC' (Morris & Adamson, 2010, p. 20). The effect of CHC can be seen in the education system, which is considered to be transmissive, teacher-centred and examination-based (Adamson, Kwan, & Chan, 2000; Cheung, 2014; Urmston, 2003; Pennington, 1995). Traditionally, Chinese parents attach great importance to education and academic achievement; 'education is seen as a main vehicle for social mobility' (Pong & Chow, 2002, p. 140).

It has been suggested that teachers in Hong Kong favour individualistic, passive behaviour from students in a classroom setting (Biggs, 1996; Morris & Adamson, 2010). This passive behaviour means that classrooms can often be very quiet, with the teacher disseminating knowledge while the students are tasked with absorbing that knowledge. Students are expected to 'know before asking', not to 'learn by asking' (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). 'Knowledge is viewed as a fixed commodity which is embodied in books and it is the task of the teacher to impart this to pupils' (Adamson & Morris, 1998, p. 201).

Another belief associated with CHC is that effort, rather than ability, determines success (Ireson, 2004). Parents and teachers expect students to work hard both inside and outside of school (Hu, 2002; Ebbeck, 1996), and a good teacher is seen as one who expects students to work hard (Corno, 1996). Tam and Chan (2011) characterised the Chinese as believing 'that intensive drilling and practice through homework assignments enhances children's academic performance' (p. 361).

In Hong Kong, examinations are considered a 'trusted mechanism for achieving social aspirations' (Brown, Kennedy, Fok, Chan, & Yu, 2009, p. 347). There is a belief in examinations as capable of evidencing the effort students have invested in learning and trust in the notion that using the same set of questions for all students under identical time constraints and conditions is indeed a fair mechanism by which to assess students' ability (Brown et al., 2009). Students, teachers and parents see assessment as having a positive, assistive impact on learning (Carless & Lam, 2014; Brown et al., 2009). Examinations are therefore seen as a way to improve teaching and learning (Brown et al., 2011). According to Brown et al. (2009), teachers from CHC societies appear to see examinations and the preparation they require as a way to motivate learners and guide their instruction.

This view in conjunction with other cultural factors has led to what Kennedy, Hue, and Tsui (2008) claimed constitutes an almost religious fervour surrounding examinations in Hong Kong. As early as 1982, the OECD identified Hong Kong as having an 'obsessive concern' with testing, with Pong and Chow (2002, p. 142) later arguing that 'examinations have built themselves into the social fabric of the Chinese society'.

This emphasis on assessment and its utility in helping students learn has led to a 'washback' effect on all levels of education in Hong Kong (Cheng, 1997), with 'the curriculum, teaching methods, and students' study methods … focused on the next major assessment hurdles' (Biggs, 1996, p. 5).

Although the government has reduced the number of external high-stakes examinations, most schools have a large number of internal assessments, starting from Primary One. Often, these include 'two end-of-term examinations and two mid-term uniform tests in a year, with each occupying about one week of school time during which normal classes are abandoned' (Pong & Chow, 2002, p. 143).

With such regular assessments, teachers often break up the curriculum into easily teachable, practicable and assessable chunks. Assessments make use of short, decontextualized questions, and teachers follow 'a strategy of teaching to the test' (Carless, 2005, p. 43).

While it is important not to overgeneralise, these beliefs have been credited with creating the assessment practices and classroom teaching methods of schools and teachers in Hong Kong (Brown, et al., 2009; Carless, 2005; Carless & Lam; 2014; Cheung, 2014; Pong & Chow, 2002).

2.6 The Role and Autonomy of Teachers in Hong Kong Education

As the focus of this study is the practices and beliefs of teachers as well as the factors influencing these practices and beliefs, it is important to devote a short section to teacher autonomy in Hong Kong. Teacher autonomy – the degree of freedom teachers have to develop and implement teaching practices to meet the pedagogical needs of their learners (Parker, 2015) – is seen as an integral part of a teacher's professionalism and an essential element of their capacity to teach effectively and with fulfilment (Benson, 2000; Parker, 2015).

While schools may have the freedom to make decisions about their school-based curriculums, this does not always translate into greater autonomy for teachers (Benson, 2016). Various constraints in a teacher's work environment, such as textbooks, syllabi, Schemes of Work and educational policy, can restrict his or her autonomy (Benson, 2016). As the previous sections have shown, there are a number of factors in the Hong Kong educational context that can constrain teachers' freedom to make decisions about their learners. The assessment practices, textbooks and hierarchical decision-making practices common in Hong Kong schools could all act as constraints on teacher freedom (Adamson & Morris, 1998 Cheung, 2014; Chien & Young, 2007a; Benson, 2016; Wan, Law, & Chan, 2018).

Since teacher autonomy is seen as an important attribute of professionalism and critical to nurturing self-directed learners, it is important to explore constraints on this autonomy within teachers' working environments. Benson (2010) conducted a study that looked at the autonomy of English language teachers in Hong Kong secondary schools. He found the teachers in the study to be constrained by a number of factors. They referred most often to the 'power of people in supervisory or surveillance positions and to documents that specified teaching content and tasks' (p. 266) as the most significant restrictions on their autonomy. Benson argued that documents such as the 'Schemes of Work':

> can be a powerful constraint on teacher autonomy because they
> specify not only content to be covered, but also the pace at which
> the teachers of the different classes in a year group should cover
> textbook units and additional tasks. (p. 266)

These, he found, were directly linked to the hierarchical decision-making process in Hong Kong schools, which is overseen by the principals and heads of departments in order to 'standardize teaching' (p. 267). This, one teacher argued, was to ensure parents and students do not complain about being 'deprived of learning opportunities' (p. 267) and to ensure 'fairness' (p. 268).

Benson (2010, p. 269) found that teachers actively sought ways to get 'around constraints'. Teachers in his study reported two ways of doing so. The first was to follow their own interpretation of the requirements of the Schemes of Work and to 'redesign tasks according to their students' abilities and interests' (p. 270). Secondly, they 'attempt[ed] to carve out space' (p. 270) to meet those learner needs not directly related to the Schemes of Work, such as increasing the pace of teaching to provide lesson time for something else.

While teachers may find ways to get around constraints in their classroom practices (Benson, 2010), doing the same with their homework practices may be less straightforward. Homework is the part of the school curriculum that is experienced by teachers, students, parents and the public alike (Vatterott, 2009). It is unique in that it bridges in-class and out-of-class learning. Schools and teachers can be compared by the amount and type of homework that they assign (Vatterott, 2009). Any adaptions or changes teachers make to their homework practices will be open to the scrutiny of parents and others, and teachers may find it more difficult to redesign practices or find space to add homework without others' knowledge.

2.7 EDB Guidelines Regarding English Language Homework

The target participants for this study were employed in government and aided

schools, which are required to develop school-based curriculums based on the

curriculum guidelines developed by the CDC (Morris & Adamson, 2010; Wang &

Kirkpatrick, 2015). These documents include specific reference to homework and

provide suggestions on the development of 'meaningful homework' practices

(CDC, 2002, 2004, 2014, 2017). It is therefore important to review these

documents and consider them when exploring teachers' homework practices and

beliefs. Below, these documents are reviewed with a focus on those sections

specifically related to English language homework in Hong Kong primary schools.

As part of the 2002 educational reforms, the EDB, previously the Education and

Manpower Bureau (EMB), released the *Basic Education Curriculum Guide* (Tam,

2009). This document was written to guide schools in developing their own

school-based curriculums in all subjects (CDC, 2002). It covers Primary One

through Form Three, spanning both primary and secondary school (CDC, 2002)

and includes a section entitled 'Meaningful Homework'. The CDC documents

encouraged schools to 'formulate a homework policy that takes into consideration

the learning needs of students and the involvement of parents' (CDC, 2002, Ch

8. p. 1). The *Basic Education Curriculum Guide (P1–P6)*, issued in 2014, revised

the original document for the primary level, with minor revisions to the homework

section (CDC, 2014). A more narrowly focused document, the *English Language*

Curriculum Guide (P1–P6), was released in 2004, focusing on the English

language curriculum in primary schools (CDC, 2004). The document provided

'guidelines, teaching ideas, suggestions and exemplars to promote effective

learning, teaching and assessment practices, and to help primary school

principals and teachers plan, develop and implement their own school-based English language curriculum' (CDC, 2004, p. 2).

The CDC documents took a positive view of homework, seeing it as an 'important component of the learning process' (CDC, 2014, Ch. 8, p. 1). However, they also emphasised the importance of 'meaningful homework', which was defined as 'assignments that encourage learners to use the English they have learnt during their lessons in purposeful and meaningful situations' (CDC, 2004, p. 184). Such homework, the documents suggested, 'helps students to construct knowledge, develop deeper understandings and connections amongst the concepts they have been introduced to, and provides an opportunity for them to apply the skills they have acquired' (CDC, 2002, Ch. 8, p. 1).

Although the documents took a positive stance towards homework, they acknowledged that homework 'can easily be abused' (CDC, 2002, Ch. 8. p. 1); the CDC argued that homework only achieves the functions stated above if it is 'well-designed' (CDC, 2002, Ch. 8, p. 1). To help teachers develop good homework practices, the documents provided advice on the quality, quantity and type of homework, teacher feedback, and parental involvement (CDC, 2004; CDC. 2014).

Consistent with their emphasis on 'meaningful homework', the documents emphasised quality over quantity in homework assignments (CDC, 2002, 2014; EDB, 2011). In the first document, published in 2002, specific recommendations were made regarding the maximum amount of time students should spend on homework each day. The CDC recommended that written homework for all

subjects taken together should not exceed 30 minutes per day for lower primary students and 60 minutes per day for upper primary students (CDC, 2002; EDB, 2011), while advocating that 'an appropriate amount of homework should be assigned to keep students inspired and wanting to do homework'; homework 'should not overburden students causing fatigue' (CDC, 2002, Ch. 8. p. 5). Notably, this suggestion regarding the appropriate quantity of assigned work was removed from the revised curriculum document in 2014. The documents now suggest that 'schools can exercise their own discretion in deciding the amount of homework according to their school-based policy.' (CDC, 2014, Section 8)

The importance of assigning homework that is interesting and meaningful is also evidenced by the documents' advice on the types of homework to be provided. The documents note that 'a variety of approaches and styles can be used for designing homework to motivate students' (CDC, 2002, Ch. 8, p. 3). They advise against focusing only on written work, worksheets, repetitive copying or 'meaningless and mechanical exercises like penmanship' (CDC, 2004, p. 185) and instead suggest that teachers assign homework with a communicative purpose, listening and speaking activities, home reading, contextualised vocabulary and grammar practices, and project work (CDC, 2004). The CDC also recommends that homework be 'learner-friendly', cater for individual differences and be neither 'too hard nor too easy' (CDC, 2002, Ch. 8 p. 3).

The CDC promotes the use of constructive feedback to students on their homework 'to help them to understand their strengths and / or weaknesses and to improve their learning' (CDC, 2002, Ch. 8. p. 8). The suggested modes of feedback include grading and written comments. The CDC (2002; 2004; 2014)

recommends that feedback make specific suggestions to students as to how they should address problems areas while acknowledging learners' efforts using 'encouraging remarks and verbal praise' (CDC, 2004, p. 187). The provision of constructive feedback to students' completed homework is integral to the idea of 'meaningful homework'.

2.7.1 Updated Homework Guidelines

Since 2015, Hong Kong primary schools' homework and assessment practices have received a significant amount of attention from the media and society more broadly. In October 2015, a Facebook petition was launched calling for an end to the primary TSA assessment. The assessment was designed as a basic competency test, and the HKEAA (2017) states that 'it facilitates assessment for learning by providing schools with objective data on students' performances in the three subjects of Chinese Language, English Language and Mathematics at the end of Key Stages 1–3'. Students have taken the TSA in Primary Three (end of Key Stage One), Primary Six (end of Key Stage Two) and Secondary Three (end of Key Stage Three) since 2004. However, the Facebook group organisers argued that the Primary Three tests were too difficulty, put unnessary pressure on children and led to students doing too much homework (Chiu, 2016) particularly drilling exercises and cramming for the test (Leung, 2015). By the end of October 2015, 40,000 parents had signed the petition calling for an end to the Primary Three TSA (Yau, 2016).

The public backlash towards the TSA led the government to issue new guidelines to schools on homework and assessment practices. On 31 October 2015, the EDB sent a circular to the supervisors and heads of all primary schools for action.

The circular, entitled *Guidelines on Homework and Tests in Schools – No Drilling, Effective Learning* (EDB, 2015, p. 1), was intended to update the guidelines on homework and assessments in schools. The cicular mainly reiterated the suggestions in the earlier guidelines regarding the quantity, type and co-ordination between different subject teachers. However, a new suggestion was for schools to 'try to arrange time within lessons as far as possible for students to complete part of their homework (e.g., that involves more writing or is more difficult) under teachers' guidance' (p. 2).

Interestingly, both schools and parents responded negatively to the circular, feeling that they were being blamed and that the EDB had not communicated well with them about their concerns (Ng, 2015). The backlash from parents continued after the curricular was issued, and the government decided to set up a committee to conduct a complete review of the Primary Three TSA in all subjects (Lam, 2018). One hundred schools were invited to trial a new format of the Primary Three TSA in 2016. Students were not required to take the test in the 2016/2017 academic year (Chiu, 2016). The Primary Six TSA and the Pre-Secondary One Attainment Test (PS1), which are taken in alternative years, were unaffected by this action (HKEAA, 2017).

2.8 Summary

English is a co-official language and one of importance in Hong Kong, its domains of use are limited but prestigious. English is still the language of higher education and many white-collar jobs in the public and private sector (Evans, 2016), and the government has the aim to make all citizens 'trilingual and biliterate'. Despite the English language curriculum promoting a holistic view of English, parents and

students often take a pragmatic and instrumental view, with the primary aim of learning English being to help them enter prestigious secondary schools, which in turn provide access to English-medium universities and white-collar professions. This has led learners to see English as a commodity, best acquired through a focus on high-stakes assessments and pedagogical practices, and dominated by reading and writing, which parents and students feel prepare them for such assessments.

The Hong Kong education system is unique in the international context. Its peculiarities have resulted in a decentralised system in which schools develop their own school-based curriculums following CDC guidelines, which have been described as dominated by assessments and textbooks (Adamson et al., 2000). Although schools are required to follow CDC guidelines when designing their curriculums, protests such as those around the TSA show that schools may not be taking note of all aspects of the curriculum and may instead be designing their curriculums and policies based on beliefs common within CHC countries. While the CDC provides guidelines on homework, there is little evidence that schools have implemented these in their school-based curriculums (Tam & Chan, 2010; Moorhouse, 2015). The education system, cultural beliefs and government guidelines may all be factors shaping teachers' practices and beliefs regarding homework. Furthermore, these factors may limit teachers' freedom to make decisions about their own practices.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review previous studies, both empirical and theoretical, on homework. As discussed in Chapter 1, homework – despite being a common topic of discussion among parents and a regular feature in the media – has received limited attention from the research community (Hallam, 2004, 2006; Vatterott, 2009; North & Pillay, 2002; Rudman, 2014; Moorhouse, 2018a). While 'out-of-class learning' and 'unregulated language learning' have recently become areas of interest in English language education and research (Nunan & Richards, 2015; Benson, 2006; Lai et al., 2015), homework or 'regulated' learning has not received the same attention (Moorhouse, 2018a). It is therefore important to review the wider literature on homework as well as the literature regarding homework in Hong Kong and in relation to English language education in other contexts. As commercial textbooks have been found to have a dominate role in English language teaching in Hong Kong, literature pertaining to their role will be discussed. As the study explores teachers' beliefs, literature regarding the formulation of beliefs and the interplay between practice and beliefs will also be explored.

This chapter provides the reader with an overview of the literature on the background to the pedagogical practice of assigning homework as well as that related to teachers' beliefs and the influences on these beliefs that impact on practices. The reviewed literature were collected from various sources, including refereed journals, subject periodicals, books and dissertations, between May 2015 and January 2018. Initial searches on the University of Exeter library

website using the advanced search options and the terms 'homework', 'primary'

(When 'elmentary' replaced 'primary, 16 articles were found, 'English' ('English'

was used instead of 'English language education' due to the large number of

terms used within the field, such as TESOL, ELT, ELE, EFL, ESL, TEFL and

TESL) , 'Hong Kong' along with the Boolean operator 'and' uncovered eighteen

articles. I selected these terms as I deemed them most relevant to my study.

These search terms were later expanded to ensure the depth and breadth of

literature. A review of the titles and abstracts of the returned results revealed that

three of the eighteen were related to homework in Hong Kong. These were

downloaded and skimmed. I scanned the reference lists and located relevant

articles cited in these papers. This process continued throughout the research

period with articles being selected on the basis of their relevance and quality

(Machi & McEvoy, 2016). The academic databases Google Scholar, JSTOR and

EBSCO, as well as the University of Hong Kong library website, were also

searched. Additional search terms used to obtain relevant literature at various

points included 'homework', 'out of class learning', 'English language education',

'ESL', 'EFL', 'TESL', 'TEFL', 'China', 'Hong Kong', 'teacher beliefs', 'teacher

autonomy' and 'teacher cognition'.

3.1 The Effects of Homework in the Primary Years

Within schools and families, 'homework' can be a divisive word that pits teachers

against students and parents against their children (Kohn, 2004). Within the

literature, opinions regarding homework range from strong criticism of homework

to claims that, if used carefully, the practice can substantially elevate children's

academic performance (Rudman, 2014). It is a common practice of teachers

globally to assign homework to their students (OECD, 2014), with homework

having been around for almost as long as schools themselves have been (Wiesenthal et al., 1997).

The debate over the role and value of homework has been both lively and cyclical, with alternate calls for more homework to increase academic performance and reducing homework so children have more time for other activities and family time (Marzano & Pickering, 2007; Cooper et al., 2006). Despite this debate and the arguments against homework, teachers, students and parents often see it as an essential part of school life.

Often-cited benefits of assigning homework include that it increases knowledge and understanding, nurtures the independent learner, eases time constraints on the curriculum and leads to greater parental participation and home–school cooperation (Cooper, 2001; OECD, 2014; Czerniawski & Kidd, 2013; Xu & Yuen, 2003). Indeed, many studies give strong reasons for assigning homework, including that it helps struggling underachievers, provides extension activities for high achievers and ensures that learned material is stored in long-term memory (OECD, 2014).

Keith et al. (1993) and Doyle and Barber (1990) reported, in their respective studies of American colleges and high schools, positive effects attributed to homework. The findings of other studies indicate that a moderate amount of homework helps raise attainment in high school students (Cooper, 2001). On the basis of their PISA test and internal research, the OECD (2014) reported that 'in most countries, homework time is correlated with student performance' in Mathematics' (p. 3). Hong Kong showed the highest correlation, with each

additional hour of Mathematics homework correlating with a 33-point higher PISA score (OECD, 2014). However, at the primary level, the benefits are much less clear (Muhlenbruck, Cooper, Nye, & Lindsay, 2000).

On the other side of the debate, the relationship between homework and performance has been disputed, as most 'published research on homework has tended to focus more on subjects that prioritises their quantitative dimensions (e.g., Mathematics and Science) and less on those subjects where the quality of writing and expression of ideas (e.g., History and English) are central to the discipline' (Czerniawski & Kidd, 2013, p. 9). This means that more research is needed before the link between homework and academic performance can be accepted as established for all subjects.

Even studies that have found a positive relationship between homework and achievement have generally found a weak link (except for mathematics) (Cooper, Lindsey, Nye, & Guesthouse, 1998) and no link at the primary level (Rudman, 2014). Eren and Henderson (2011), in their study of the effect of homework on the Mathematics, Science, English and History scores of fifth graders in the United States found that 'Math homework consistently gives a statistically meaningful and large positive effect on test scores for the full sample. However, additional homework in science, English and history are shown to have little to no impact on test scores' (p. 951). These kinds of findings have led some to question the benefits of homework.

In primary school, the benefits of homework are less clear. There have been very few studies on early grades (Rudman 2014; Medwell & Wray, 2018), and the

research that has been done on homework assignment to primary age students has generally found 'no gains' in young learners' academic performance (Cooper, 1989; Farrow, Tymms, & Henderson, 1999; Hattie, 2009). Farrow et al.'s (1999) study on primary school students' homework and attainment in the UK found that 'those pupils who did very regular homework made less progress than those who did [homework] infrequently' (p. 331). Giving a little homework was better than giving none; however, giving more had a negative effect. The scholars suggested that more research is needed.

Those who argue against homework suggest that it is physically and emotionally tiring, leads to loss of interest in a subject, causes conflict between students and teachers as well as parents and children, interferes with children's other activities, and fosters cheating and superficial engagement (Czerniawski & Kidd, 2013; Kohn, 2006). Wildman (1986) argues, 'Whenever homework crowds out social experience, outdoor recreation, and creative activities, and whenever it usurps time devoted to sleep, it is not meeting the basic needs of children and adolescents' (p. 203).

The debate over the benefits of homework is nothing new. A study conducted by Rice (1897) more than 100 years ago found that the length of time spent on spelling homework had no relation to later spelling ability. The author argued that students should spend their time on activities other than homework. In 1927, Brockbank warned against the dangers to children of too much homework. It reported that 'excessive homework dulls the mind. It seems desirable, therefore, that the hours assigned … in the day schools to homework should be materially diminished' (pp. 846–847).

With such strong and conflicting arguments appearing in the literature, it is important to examine teachers' beliefs. Their conceptions could materially affect the benefits and disadvantages of homework. Indeed, Czerniawski and Kidd (2013) placed the blame for any negative effects of homework squarely on the shoulders of teachers, arguing that homework's 'inability as a strategy to raise achievement is often the result of the misuse of homework as a teaching strategy and poor communication on the part of the teacher' (p. 10). This blame, however, may be misplaced if teachers are working in a context that limits their autonomy and freedom to make choices about their teaching. As discussed in the context section, this has been observed to be the case in Hong Kong schools (Benson, 2010).

Despite the arguments against homework, studies have found that students, teachers and parents see homework as useful (Cooper et al., 1998; Xu, 2005) and that 'students, parents, and teachers expect homework assignment' (Pendergrass, 1985, p. 310). This expectation may be one of the reasons for the persistence of homework practices despite the dearth of empirical evidence in support of homework. These beliefs are explored in greater detail in the latter part of this review. Yet, both educators and researchers remain concerned about the amount, type and purposes of homework assigned (Kralovec & Buell, 2000).

3.2 Teacher's Homework Practices

Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) made the point that homework begins with the teacher. It is the teacher who chooses the topics and assignments, decides whether or not to set homework, and is chiefly responsible for homework routines.

Often, teachers in different schools and different grades, and even those in the same grade, may treat homework differently (Bryan & Burstein, 2004). This adds to the challenge for the researcher and emphasises the impact beliefs may have on homework practices. Moreover, practices may differ between primary and secondary school. In primary school, due to students' lack of maturity, teachers may spend a substantial amount of time setting, explaining, correcting, marking and giving feedback on homework (Pendergrass, 1985).

Teachers' homework practices have been shown to influence students' motivation and effort in relation to homework. The biggest impact comes from the quality of homework given, its frequency, the guidance provided and the relationships between the content of the homework and students' own interests (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Trautwein, Ludtke, Schnyder, & Niggli, 2006). In this section, literature referring to different elements of teachers' homework practices, such as purpose, quality and amount, will be reviewed.

3.2.1 Purpose of Assigning Homework

Teachers may have a variety of reasons for assigning homework. Wiesenthal et al. (1997) identified six common reasons that teachers often provide for assigning homework to their students:

1. Homework helps students develop good work habits (Savage, 1988; Lee & Pruitt, 1979).

2. Homework assists students in acquiring greater knowledge of the subject matter (Cooper, 1989).

3. Homework helps students build self-confidence and positive associations regarding schoolwork (Coulter, 1981; Turvey, 1986).

4. Homework helps teachers improve their education practice. Homework can act as a form of assessment. Teachers can observe what students have or have not learnt by reviewing their homework.

5. Homework allows for improved home–school communication (Epstein, 1991).

6. Homework increases the credibility of the school within the community.

Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) outlined ten reasons teachers give for assigning homework: practice, preparation, participation, personal development, parent–child relationship, parent–teacher communication, peer interactions, policy, public relations and punishment. Clearly, some of these are pedagogical, while others, such as policy, public relations and punishment, are not. Doing homework has also been argued to teach life skills such as 'self-regulation and self-appraisal' (Jabr, 2012, p. 32), while others have argued that it 'disciplines minds, develops study habits, fosters self-discipline, encourages responsibility, requires time management and unleashes creativity' (Pendergrass, 1985, p. 310). However, these justifications for assigning homework often seem to arise from speculation, and rarely do we find empirical studies to support these claims.

Farrow et al. (1999) identified a number of reasons that teachers may give homework, including 'worry. Pupils, teachers and parents might be worried about scores on tests, particularly those related to statutory assessments' (p. 337). Furthermore, they may give homework to fulfil requirements or just to keep children busy (Farrow et al., 1999). Finally, 'teachers know that they are supposed to give homework and that in some cases they will be judged on that basis' (p. 337). These are clearly non-academic reasons, and teachers may be

assigning homework against their own beliefs in order to satisfy other stakeholders.

Eren and Henderson (2011) suggested that homework has a relatively low cost compared to other curriculum or school changes, such as hiring more teachers. When teachers or schools want to boost student performance, they may have limited options. Assigning homework could be one way of showing that they are doing something, even if there are limited benefits. This, coupled with the 'explosion of knowledge' in recent years, has led to a crowded curriculum, with teachers having difficulty covering everything during class (Smith, 2003, p. 755).

Studies in the US have found that, at the primary level, teachers tend to set homework to help students develop good time management, good study habits and positivity towards school rather than to enhance academic achievement (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Muhlenbruck et al., 2000). Homework is also used to show that learning can take place outside of school (Cooper, 1994). It is important to note that these studies relate to the US elementary context, where a class has the same teacher for all subjects. As discussed in Chapter 2, Hong Kong operates a subject-based system in primary schools, and each subject teacher is responsible for setting homework for their own subject.

Tam and Chan (2011) found that, in Hong Kong, parents tended to see the main function of homework as meeting 'immediate learning goals' (p. 574). However, their study only gave respondents four options to choose from when selecting the function of homework: immediate learning goals, long-term learning goals, meeting external demands and home–school communication. No options were

included for non-academic benefits such as the development of self-discipline. Another consideration is the idea that homework is usually completed without the support of an adult; however, with primary school students, this may not be the case (as discussed in more detail later) (Rudman, 2014).

It can be seen from the above section that the reasons for assigning homework are often related to sociocultural or contextual influences, such as school and parental expectations and common conceptions in society regarding the value of homework. It is important then to explore the rationale given for teachers' assignment of homework in the Hong Kong context and to examine whether these align with previous studies on homework in the USA and other countries or whether cultural perceptions and beliefs are impacting on teachers' homework practices in Hong Kong.

3.2.2 Type of Homework Assigned

Often, research has focused on the amount of time spent of homework by students and their homework behaviour and not on the type of homework teachers are setting or their routines (Vatterott, 2009; Sharp, Keys, & Benefield, 2001). Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) argued that 'research is needed that examines whether the design and content of homework match the teachers' stated purposes, and how different homework designs affect students' outcomes' (p. 183). However, in the 17 years since this call, little research had been done on homework design. Rudman (2014) argued that there is 'no broad professional agreement amongst teachers and researchers about how to plan, set or mark homework, or indeed about its effectiveness as a teaching and learning tool' (p. 13).

Brock, Lapp, Floods, Fisher and Han (2007), in a study conducted in the US that looked at teachers' homework practices from kindergarten through to middle school, found that the most common homework given was mathematics, followed by free reading and spelling. The researchers found that it was common for teachers to assign homework on a Monday, expecting it to be submitted on a Friday. In the same study, all the teachers interviewed said that they assigned some reading every night and that parents needed to sign to prove that the reading had been done. The student could select the books. Most of the teachers assigned homework that 'focused on basic skills such as math, reading and spelling' (Brock et al., 2007, p. 359).

In their recent study of British primary school teachers' practices and beliefs regarding homework, Medwell and Wray (2018) found that homework was an 'almost universal activity' (p. 11) with common homework tasks for children aged 4 to 5 being reading with parents, while those aged 5 to 7 were asked to complete worksheets, workbooks, online learning games or projects and self-selected activities. For students between the ages of 7 and 11, there was an increase in the amount of homework, which focused on spelling lists and worksheets. These were primarily set to help learners practice the knowledge or skills focused on in class. As in the US, teachers in England are assigned to a single class, which they teach for the entire school day.

North and Pillay (2002) conducted a study into the homework practices of English language teachers in Malaysia. Their study involved 85 English teachers from secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur. They explored the teachers' homework

policies and whether their homework tasks effectively contributed to their course objectives. They found that Malaysian EFL teachers in their study were setting English homework two to three times per week. North and Pillay believed this was a relatively high amount of homework and argued that the students could be 'overburden[ed] with homework' (p. 139). Teachers were primarily using their own worksheets, commercial textbooks and workbooks for homework and cited the primary purposes for which they were setting homework as:

- to practise what had been learnt in class;

- to give the teacher feedback on students' strengths and weaknesses; and

- to complete work begun in class.

- The most common homework tasks were:

- grammar exercises;

- guided writing exercises;

- corrections;

- reading comprehension questions; and

- writing compositions (free writing).

They found that 'closed types of tasks were preferred to more open-ended tasks, and there seemed to be a preference for homework which generated a written product' (p. 140), with teachers favouring grammar exercises, guided writing and reading comprehension. North and Pillay (2002) argued that this focus on written products could stem from the need for 'visible evidence that work has been duly performed' (p. 142).

Moorhouse (2018a) conducted a study on the homework practices of primary school English language teachers in Hong Kong. The study found that Hong Kong primary school teachers set a large amount of homework: 99% set

homework every day, with an average of two to three pieces of homework going home daily. The majority of teachers expected that students would take 21–40 minutes to complete all their English language homework. A third of teachers spent 11–20 minutes on homework-related activities such as setting, explaining and demonstrating homework and providing feedback during their lessons. The most common kinds of homework focused on practising grammar and vocabulary skills. Moorhouse (2018a) found that Hong Kong teachers assigned listening and speaking activities with the least regularity.

Tam and Chan (2011) found that Hong Kong parents and students least preferred homework tasks involving drilling, copying texts and memorisation. Instead, students preferred homework tasks that required peer collaboration and imagination, whereas parents preferred tasks involving thinking and reading. This is different from the types of homework that teachers seem to be assigning in both Malaysia and Hong Kong. Tam and Chan (2011) acknowledged this by saying that the type of homework preferred by parents and students deviates from 'traditional Chinese educational practices [which] emphasize drilling for the enhancement of learning' (p. 577).

Although few studies have focused on the types of homework tasks assigned to students (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Medwell & Wray, 2018), it is evident that, across contexts, there seems to be a focus on reading, workbooks, worksheets and exercises.

3.2.3 The Quality of Homework Assigned

While the research on homework types is scant, studies on homework quality seem almost non-existent. Alleman et al. (2014) noted that studies on homework rarely distinguish between 'well-designed and poorly designed homework' (p. 15). However, many scholars argue that homework is often badly designed and that this has a strong effect on its usefulness as a learning tool (Czerniawski & Kidd, 2013; Vatterott, 2009). Others argue that homework tasks are commonly tedious and of poor quality. Henderson (2006) states,

> Whilst learning in school [has] apparently become more varied, more differentiated and more imaginative, learning outside of the classroom [seems] to be stuck in a time warp where the tasks lack of quality of thinking as to the needs of the learner. (p. 23)

This thought is echoed by Rudman (2014), who argues that 'despite changes in curriculum and innovation in technology, the practises of teachers regarding homework have changed little in the last thirty years' (p. 13) and that 'teachers themselves are often wedded to homework practices conceived in the early decades of the twentieth century' (p. 25).

3.2.4 The Quantity of Homework Assigned

While few studies have examined the quality of homework assigned, a number have explored the quantity of homework assigned (Cooper, 2006; Medwell & Wray, 2018; Moorhouse, 2018a; Tam & Chan, 2011). Based on a large meta-analysis of research studies conducted on homework, Cooper (2006) suggested that research findings support the idea of a '10-minute rule' (p. 92), that is, that all subject homework combined should not take more than 10 minutes multiplied by the student's grade level, so a Primary One student should not receive more than 10 minutes of homework in total per day. Cooper's rule has been challenged

by Kohn (2006), an anti-homework scholar, who stated that Cooper's studies reveal 'further examples of his determination to massage the numbers until they yield something – anything – on which to construct a defence of homework for young children' (p. 84).

Medwell and Wray (2018) found that primary teachers in England were setting, on average, between 15 and 60 minutes of homework a night for 8- to 9-year-old children, while 43% of teachers expected 10- to 11-year-old children to spend 30–60 minutes per night on homework, and a further 46% expected them to spend more than an hour. This was significantly less for students under the age of 7.

Studies in China and Hong Kong have found that students commonly spend a substantial amount of time on homework outside of school. Tam and Chan's study (2011) found that Hong Kong students were taking home over an hour of homework per night at the upper primary level (8–12 years of age). This is supported an earlier study by Tam (2009), which found students to be doing a significant amount of homework every night. Moorhouse's (2018a) study found similar practices in terms of the quantity of English language homework set by teachers.

3.2.5 Responding to Homework Assignments

One of the few studies to examine homework in the foreign language classroom was conducted by Wallinger (2000). In her study of French language teachers' homework practices at the secondary level in the US, Wallinger found that most teachers used homework in some way; however, they rarely gave feedback and

only confirmed completion without checking for accuracy. She argues that, when setting homework, teachers must monitor homework assignments that extend class time 'to limit the chance of incorrect practice, which may lead to bad habits becoming second nature' (p. 495).

The study conducted by Medwell and Wray (2018) found that less than half of primary school teachers in England surveyed marked students' homework each week. Instead, they used less formal means, such as peer review and self-marking. The vast majority (93%) spent less than 30 minutes each week preparing, setting, monitoring and marking homework. These findings may present a different picture from the one in Hong Kong due to the value placed on homework as well as value corrective feedback by teachers and parents (Tam, 2009; Lee, 2009).

3.3 Parental Involvement and Homework

As homework is intended to be completed at home, researchers have examined the impact of parental involvement on children's homework practices and performance.

Research has found that, as students get older, parents tend to be less involved in their children's homework (Epstein & Lee, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Tam & Chan, 2011). This has been attributed to a rise in the level of complexity of homework tasks, which leave parents feeling less confident to help, as well as the increasing independence of children as they get older and become better at managing their time and responsibilities (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001).

In primary schools, Rudman (2014, p. 18) suggests that 'involving parents in the homework process is likely to be a key factor in its effectiveness as an extension of classroom based learning' and that 'parents often see homework as the only way to be involved in their child's life at school' (Rudman, 2014, p. 18). Parental involvement in homework can have a positive effect on students' attitudes towards homework and their self-perceptions in addition to enhancing their work habits and self-regulation (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001).

Reviews of research findings (Cooper, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001) report a mixed picture of the benefits of parental involvement and suggest that there is no clear relationship between parents' homework involvement and student achievement. Levin and Riffel (1997) found little evidence to support the link between parental involvement and student attainment and suggested that it was not the amount of parental involvement but the kind of involvement that was important. Furthermore, it can be challenging to measure the impact of parent involvement and students' attitudes on performance (Tam & Chan, 2011).

Stevenson and Lee (1996) suggested that it is common for parents in Asia to offer help with homework by monitoring completion and providing guidance on homework tasks. Tam and Chan (2011, p. 94) found that primary school parents in Hong Kong see helping their child with homework as their duty and devoted 'considerable time to supervis[ing] their children's homework'. However, one third of the study's participants reported that they did not help their children at all. Tam and Chan argued that this seemed strange in the Hong Kong context and called for more research.

3.4 Homework in English Language Education

Within English language education, much of the focus of research, theory and practice has focused on learning in the classroom and on 'how the classroom, together with teachers, learners, and learning resources can provide the necessary conditions for learning to occur' (Nunan & Richards, 2015, p. xi). Therefore, what happens outside of the classroom has only rarely been explored.

For many in English language education, homework is seen as necessary (Moorhouse, 2017). Educators argue that there is insufficient class time for learners to become capable English language users and that they must continue learning beyond the classroom (Thornbury, 2012; Scott, 2015). While out-of-class learning has been associated with language gains (Larsson, 2012; Lai, Zhu, & Gong, 2015), these studies explored self-directed out-of-class learning rather than teacher-directed out-of-class learning such as homework. Painter (2004) described homework as the 'cornerstone of students' learning process' (p. 5), arguing that it gives learners an incentive to practise and use English outside the classroom and keeps English 'learning in their minds' (p. 6). Thornbury (2006) goes as far as to say that 'there are grounds to believe that what happens between lessons may have as much importance as what happens during lessons' (p. 96). These assumptions are often grounded in common sense rather than in empirical research, as evidenced by the lack of literature on homework within the English language educational literature (North & Pillay, 2002; Moorhouse, 2017).

English language commentators, such as Thornbury (2006) and Painter (2004), rarely discuss the age or proficiency of the learners when discussing homework. As mentioned, earlier age can be an important factor in the impact of homework

on students' academic performance. Without considering these factors, it could be hard to draw conclusions on homework's effectiveness as a strategy with young English language learners.

It is noted that, although homework is not often discussed in English language literature, other practices such as extensive reading, online learning modes and other ways language learners learn outside of the classroom have been explored (Nunan & Richards, 2015). These, however, are often notably different from homework in terms of the roles imposed on learners and teachers as well as their link to the classroom practices of English language teachers in schools. In this context, the need for further research into the homework practices and beliefs of English language teachers is self-evident.

3.5 Role of Textbooks in English Language Teaching in Hong Kong

When considering English language teaching and homework, it is worth exploring the role of coursebooks and textbooks. These have become synonymous with English language teaching globally and are often an integral part of English language curriculums and classrooms (Harmer, 2015).

For many years, there have been debates within the English language teaching field whether textbooks are the 'best medium for delivering language-learning materials' (Tomlinson, 2012, p.157). The advantages and disadvantages of textbooks have been widely discussed by various scholars in the English language teaching community (McGrath, 2016). McGrath (2016, p.14-16) summarises the advantages and disadvantages he found in the current literature as follows:

- Advantages: textbooks provide structure; they provide language samples; they define what is learnt and what needs to be tested; they reinforce what the teacher has done and make revision and preparation possible; they save time; they offer linguistic examples; they provide cultural and methodological support; they make it easier to keep track of what has been done and are evidence of teaching.

- Disadvantages: textbooks take the initiative away from the teacher; language samples may not be authentic or accurate; they restrict the teacher and learners; they take class time away from the teacher and they are written for a wide audience.

In addition to the practical and pedagogical disadvantages mentioned above, scholars have been concerned with and evaluated the content of textbooks from different social perspectives, such as representation of cultures (McGrath, 2004; Yuen, 2011), gender (Ariyanto, 2018; Yang, 2011; 2016) and moral education (Feng, 2017), with textbooks often found to react to social change slowly and depict an outdated or sanitised view of the world with a dominance of Western culture.

Others have investigated the structure, features and content of textbooks through the framework of popular methodologies, such as communicative language teaching and task-based learning (Ko, 2014; Butler, Kang, Kim & Liu, 2018; Tong, Adamson & Che, 2000). Generally, these studies have found that textbooks show weak forms of the methodologies and that they often lag behind changes in methods and curriculum reforms.

Despite often compelling reasons for not using textbooks, their popularity has not waned. This seems to be partly due to the selection criteria for textbooks and the processes of textbook selection. In a study of textbooks in 12 countries, Tomlinson (2010) found that textbooks 'were selected by administrators and teachers for their help in standardisation, preparation and assessment' (p.5). There is also a belief that many teachers, parents and students hold in many parts of the world that textbooks are an authoritative source of knowledge and teachers feel that they do not have the skills or expertise to develop their own teaching materials (Richards, 1998).

There seems to be a consensus amongst many English language teaching scholars that textbooks are needed as they provide teachers and students with 'security', 'structure' and 'visibility' (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994, p.322). However, at the same time, scholars suggest textbooks should be localised, flexible and allow for choice (Tomlinson, 2012). Furthermore, teachers should have some degree of autonomy to make choices, modifications and replace content to meet the needs of their learners (Tomlinson, 2012).

In Confucian heritage cultures, as has been briefly discussed in Chapter 2, textbooks have been found to take a central role in teaching and learning. Often teachers are required to implement a prescribed textbook (Butler, 2011; 2018) and deliver the material in a lockstep fashion to ensure standardisation of teaching and learning and therefore ensure fairness in examinations and assessments (Benson, 2010). In these cultures, textbooks are also considered to be an authoritative source of knowledge and provide learners with the subject

knowledge they need (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). A study by Maley (1986, p.104) of Chinese learners in China found that they perceived the textbook to have the required knowledge for academic success and that learning means the conversion of 'knowledge in the textbooks into memory'.

Such beliefs have also been used to explain the dominance of textbooks in English language teaching and learning in Hong Kong (Adamson & Lee, 1993; Chien & Young, 2007a; Adamson & Davison, 2003; Carless & Wong, 2000), where the majority of schools base their teaching on commercial textbooks (Lee, 2005).

It is important to note that there are no government-mandated textbooks in Hong Kong unlike in Mainland China and other Asian contexts (Butler, 2018). Instead, Hong Kong operates an open market for textbooks, allowing schools the autonomy to select textbooks to meet their needs. Schools can refer to the 'Recommended Textbook List' on the EDB website (EDB, 2019). These textbooks have been vetted and deemed to be compatible with the latest curriculum documents. However, schools can choose to use materials and textbooks that do not appear on the list (EDB, 2019). The biggest commercial publishers in the Hong Kong market are Longman, Oxford University Press and Education Publishing House Limited.

Along with the textbook, these publishers produce a large number of supplementary books and materials which are often skills-based, such as grammar books, listening books, reading books, mock test papers and handwriting books (Longman, 2019; OUP, 2019; Education Publishing House

Limited, 2019). The keen competition between the publishers for market share in this profitable market has led some to suggest that they try to satisfy the needs of teachers and schools over methodological innovations and curriculum reforms (Adamson & Lee, 1994). While the government has been promoting Communicative Language Teaching and Task-based Learning since 1997, Chan (2019) found through content analysis that English language teaching secondary textbooks in Hong Kong are still dominated by language exercises and weak forms of Task-based Learning. Tong et al. (2000) found a similar finding in their analysis of three sets of primary English textbooks. Hong Kong English language textbooks have been criticised for being more concerned with preparing students for high-stakes assessments rather than mastery of the subject content (Leung & Andrews, 2012).

Although there has been a long tradition in the use of textbooks in English language teaching in Hong Kong (Sweeting, 1993), there have been few empirical studies of stakeholders' perceptions of them, their effectiveness as a teaching tool or their use in the classroom. Instead, scholars have tended to study their content from various perspectives, as mentioned above (Ko, 2014; Yang, 2011; 2016; Tong et al., 2000). However, scholars have commented on the role of textbooks in Hong Kong English classrooms. Richards, Tung and Ng (1993) suggest that English teachers have a heavy reliance on textbooks as the principal teaching tool. Carless and Wong (2000) state that English teachers often rely on textbooks because of pressure from parents and a requirement to 'finish the textbook' (p.123) and because they 'lack confidence in their own English proficiency' (p.123). Benson (2010) found textbooks to be one of the tools used

by senior teachers to standardise practices and ensure all students receive the same instruction for fairness in assessment.

A study conducted by Chien and Young (2007a) about Hong Kong teachers' perceptions and use of textbooks through two rounds of in-depth semi-structured interviews with three primary school teachers, one being an English teacher, found the teachers viewed textbooks positively. They found the teachers used textbooks for

- expediency – participants felt it reduced their planning time, enhanced their teaching and the textbook provided 'fun and stimulating ways or their students to learn' (p.159);

- capacity building – participants felt that they did not have the skills or knowledge in curriculum design and therefore relied on the textbook; and

- building a community of practice – the textbook provided a 'reference point' in group planning and evaluation (p.160).

Chien and Young (2007a) also found that the teachers were aware of some of the 'pitfalls' of the textbook, including that they did not cater well for learners' diverse needs, but believed that the benefits outweighed the pitfalls.

As the discussion above shows, textbooks have continued to play a dominant role in English language teaching in Hong Kong: teachers are seen to rely on them, parents expect them, and school administrators use them as a tool to standardise practices and ensure fairness of assessment. With a large number of supplementary books and materials available from the commercial publishers, it is likely that the textbook will have a significant influence over teachers' homework practices.

3.6 Teachers' Beliefs

The concept of 'beliefs' is used in various domains in the research literature, including sociology, psychology, anthropology and philosophy (Zheng, 2009). The term 'beliefs' is acknowledged to be a complex construct, which can be difficult to differentiate or separate from other concepts, including attitudes, knowledge, opinion and ideology (Pajares, 1992). The phrase 'teacher beliefs' is used frequently in the educational literature to explain and examine teachers' actions and decision-making in the classroom (Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015). While the research literature and domains of use of the concepts are broad and there can be overlaps with other psychological terms, prior research on teacher beliefs have helped lead to some agreement on several characteristics of teacher beliefs (Richardson, 1996).

First, 'teacher beliefs' are seen as 'a subset of constructs that name, define and describe the structure and content of mental states' that are understood to underpin a person's actions (Richardson, 1996, p.103). They serve as a way to filter experiences and help people 'define and understand the world and themselves' (Pajares, 1992, p.325). As teachers experience something new or are exposed to new knowledge, they will view it through their belief system and devise meaning from this. Therefore, beliefs play a 'key role in knowledge interpretation and cognitive monitoring' (Pajares, 1992, p.325). These beliefs may be consciously and unconsciously held (Borg, 2001). While teachers accept them to be truths, they understand that other teachers may have alternative or different opinions about the same issue (Borg, 2001).

Second, beliefs are relatively rigid and hard to change once established. Pajeres (1992, p.324) argues that teachers form their beliefs early in their lives and that these beliefs 'tend to self-perpetuate, persevering even against contradictions caused by reason, time, schooling or experience'. Rokeach (1968) explains that these beliefs involve characteristics which are taken for granted and not open to discussion or change. Such core beliefs are often developed in childhood, with belief change in adulthood thought to be a 'rare phenomenon', even when someone is exposed to new knowledge or truths (Pajeres, 1992, p.325). These beliefs form part of an individual's self-identity, and any challenge to these can cause instability in their self (Rokeach, 1968). The more recently a belief is acquired, the more vulnerable it is to change (Pajeres, 1992). Indeed, studies have found that more experienced language teachers' stated beliefs are more consistent with their practices (Baskurkem, 2012), This, Breen et al. (2001) suggest, is due to the principles guiding the teacher's actions becoming more embedded 'with experience' (p.472).

Third, it is difficult to distinguish between belief and knowledge. In literature, often there can be confusion between these two concepts. Pajeres (1992) suggests that a common difference between beliefs and knowledge is that beliefs are related to subjectivity and emotions, while knowledge tends to be seen as empirical and factual. However, others suggest that beliefs can also originate from academic and empirical concepts (Richards & Lockhart, 1994).

Fourth, beliefs can come from three categories of experience: personal experiences, experience with schooling and instruction, and experiences with formal knowledge (Richardson, 1996). Personal experiences include all aspects

of one's life. These will be shaped by our individual characteristics, such as ethnic and socio-economic background, gender, geographical location, and religious upbringing (Richardson, 1996). Before pre-service teacher education, teachers often have strong and well-established beliefs about teaching and learning through their experience of being students and their culture and contexts (Pajeres, 1992). Lortie (1975) calls this 'apprentice of observation'. Research has found that teachers' own experiences of teaching and learning in the classroom have a stronger impact than teacher education on pre-service teachers' beliefs (Anning, 1988; Knowles, 1992). Richardson (1996, p.110) defines 'formal knowledge' as 'understandings that have been agreed upon within a community of scholars as worthwhile and valid'. While the impact of formal knowledge gained during teacher education and professional development has been found to be less impactful than personal experiences and experiences of schooling, it has been found to have some influence. Clift (1987) found that teachers who had received teacher education training and those that had not performed differently in the classroom, and these differences were attributed to pedagogical knowledge.

Fifth, the relationship between beliefs and practice is complex due to the origin and role of an individual's beliefs. Beliefs are seen to have a strong impact on teachers' actions and behaviour (Pajeres, 1992) and are seen as a major source of decision-making in education (Clark, 1998). Lee (2009, p.13) notes that 'research on teachers' beliefs has demonstrated that beliefs have an important impact on teachers' practice', and as the above discussion shows, teachers' beliefs can come from their experiences. This makes practice and beliefs 'bi-directional' (Borg, 2004). Foss and Kleinsasser (1996) call this a 'symbiotic

relationship' (p.441) with a complex interplay between practices and beliefs. However, research has found consistencies and inconsistencies between teachers' practices and beliefs (Fang, 1996). Studies of English language teachers have found a strong relationship between beliefs and classroom practices (Borg, 2003), while others have found that teachers' beliefs do not always reflect what they do in the classroom (Phipps & Borg, 2007; Basturkmen, 2012; Farrell & Bennis, 2013). Basturkmen (2012) conducted a review of research into the correspondence between language teachers' stated beliefs and practice and found evidence that the relationship between beliefs and practices 'were mediated by contextual factors' (p.286). These contextual factors include prescribed curriculums, time constraints and examinations. These, Basturkmen (2012) suggested, could cause conflict between teachers' beliefs and practices and constrain teachers from implementing practices that matched their beliefs. Lee (2009) found a similar result in Hong Kong, where teachers were found to have a number of discordances between their beliefs and practices. The teachers in the study attributed these differences to 'constraints imposed by institutional context and values, like exam pressure and school policy' (p.19).

The above discussion has explored important aspects of 'teacher beliefs' and the complex and important role they play in understanding teachers' thoughts and practices. It has demonstrated that beliefs can have varying degrees of rigidity, depending on the length of time the belief has been held. In this study, the term 'beliefs' will be taken to include 'the complexity of teachers' mental lives underlying their practices' (Zheng, 2009, p.74) and describe a 'proposition that is accepted as true' by the teachers in the study (Richardson, 1996, p.105). I acknowledge that as beliefs are a part of a person's mental state, there will

always be a degree of inferring on the part of the researcher, and I must be mindful of this (Pajares, 1992). This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

3.6.1 Teachers' Beliefs Regarding Homework

Although a number of studies have explored parents' and students' beliefs regarding homework, less is known about the beliefs of teachers (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Farrell & Danby, 2015; Brock et al., 2007; Warton, 2001; Rudman, 2014; Medwell & Wray, 2018).

Kralovec and Buell (2000, p. 9) argued that in many schools and educational contexts 'the belief in the value of homework is akin to faith'. Vatterott (2009) later suggested that 'beliefs about the inherent goodness of homework are so entrenched, so unshakable for many parents and educators, they seem cultlike' (2009, p. 9). She attributed these beliefs to a variety of factors:

1. the curriculum (a great quantity of homework and the difficulty of homework provide evidence of a rigorous curriculum);

2. the school practice (the school must ask children to do their homework, and a school that claims students do a lot of homework is a serious, credible one);

3. the image of teachers (good teachers give homework);

4. the image of pupils (good students do their homework, and by doing homework children become more responsible and independent and learn to manage their time); and

5. the perspective on the nature of learning activities that students need to be requested to do (in particular the relationship between intellectual

activities and non-intellectual ones, in light of the fact that intellectual activities are seen as more valuable than non-intellectual activities).

Brock et al. (2007) found that teachers believe homework to provide the opportunity to practice skills as well as fulfilling other purposes, such as the opportunity to teach discipline, meet parental expectations and comply with district requirements. The teachers in their study also believed that, the more students read at home, the better they would be at reading. These teachers were therefore assigning reading as homework. However, they also found that teachers could not provide direct evidence of the benefits of assigning reading as homework and relied on their own beliefs that students gained mastery in proportion to the amount of time spent on an activity. Brock et al. (2007) also found some participants who were willing to challenge this assumption. They felt that this was important as it is critical for teachers to question and challenge existing practices (Brock et al., 2007). They argued that 'A question that merits our consideration as an educational community is why we may continue to engage in "tried-and-true" practices that may not be useful to promote educational achievement' (p. 368). However, Matei and Ciasca's (2015) study with primary teachers in Romania found that the teachers in their study often praised the benefits of homework while ignoring its drawbacks.

A study by Tam and Chan (2016) of conceptions of homework among Hong Kong primary school teachers concluded that teachers 'considered homework an essential part of learning' (p. 31). However, this inference was drawn from the quantity of homework teachers were assigning their students and overlooks the potential existence of other external factors aside from beliefs that may account

for the amount of homework teachers assign. The researchers did, however, offer

an interesting example from an English language teacher who shared her view

on learning English:

> English is a second language to our students. So they need to copy
>
> text in order to strengthen their memory. It is especially the case with
>
> students whose parents are not competent to supervise English
>
> learning; they need to put more time in practicing. (Tam & Chan,
>
> 2016, p. 32)

Tam and Chan (2016) argued that Hong Kong teachers' beliefs about homework

are 'rooted in the sociocultural contexts of the education system' (p. 37). Although

teachers may have positive perceptions of homework, this does not mean that

such beliefs are the sole factor affecting practice. There are likely to be other

factors that impact on teaching practices as these relate to the assignment of

homework.

3.7 Influences on Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

In this section of the literature review, I explore various sociocultural and

contextual factors that may influence teachers' beliefs and practices, including

schooling, professional development and teacher training, classroom practices

and cultural factors (Borg, 2003).

Teachers' beliefs and practices are affected by their own professional

development and teacher training. This includes courses they have taken,

practicum experience they have completed, observation of colleagues, specific

training they have received on giving homework, and their personal reading on

homework. However, from his review of research into what teachers think, know,

believe and do, Borg (2003) found that while 'professional preparation does shaping trainees' cognitions, programmes which ignore trainee teachers' prior beliefs may be less effective at influencing' their cognition (p. 81).

As homework 'is seldom touched on in teacher training' (North & Pillay, 2002, p. 137) and teachers are not well trained on how to assign homework (Bennett & Kalish, 2006), teachers may have limited opportunities for exposure to alternative approaches to homework. This may leave them unaware of how to devise novel approaches or without any option but to continue traditional practices. In Hong Kong, Moorhouse (2018a) found that fewer than 50% of the primary English language teachers in his study had received any type of training on giving homework. Furthermore, Moorhouse (2017) reported that, in his faculty – a high-ranking teacher education faculty – homework was rarely mentioned in either the undergraduate or postgraduate teacher education programmes.

As previously noted, teachers' practices can be shaped by the 'social, psychological and environmental realities of the school and classroom' (Borg, 2003, p. 94). Contextual factors such as parents, school management requirements, the school, society, the curriculum, school policy, colleagues, examinations and resources can impact on teachers' practices and beliefs (Borg, 2003). These factors can 'hinder language teachers' ability to adopt practices which reflect their beliefs' (p. 94). Often, teachers believe these contextual factors to be beyond their control (Johnson, 1994; Richards & Pennington, 1998). Below, I will explore some of these issues in relation to homework.

Coutts (2004) argues that 'many teachers assign homework because the school community will judge them harshly if they do not' (pp. 183–184). Teachers may know that they have to give homework and are expected to do so by other teachers and their colleagues at school (Farrow et al., 1999), leading them to set homework to impress stakeholders rather than to fulfil any pedagogical needs.

Issues such as limited time have been found to have a marked effect on language teachers' actions (Borg, 2003). Teachers have limited time to prepare their materials and develop ones that cater for learners' differences or needs (Crookes & Arakaki, 1999). Consequently, teachers may set tasks that are easier to mark or grade, such as copying, as they fear having insufficient time to mark more varied homework tasks.

Moorhouse (2015) did not examine school policies in detail, only asking participants whether such policies were in place (in response to which 88% of respondents confirmed that their school had a homework policy for English). Nevertheless, teachers seemed to think that such policies presented a barrier to them implementing the homework of their choice. School policies may therefore restrict teachers' pedagogical choices by compelling them to conform to the dominant beliefs of the school management. Hong Kong schools are considered hierarchical, with the principal often being the main decision maker (Benson, 2010; Morris & Adamson, 2010; Wan et al., 2018).

In Hong Kong primary schools, learners come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and often enter school with different levels of linguistic skill. Those with greater family support, English-speaking parents or English-speaking

domestic helpers are likely to enter primary school with some command of English or even a high proficiency. These children may also have attended four years of kindergarten in English and may have received extra tuition in the sizeable 'shadow education' in operation in Hong Kong (Bray, 2006; Bray, Zhan, Lykins, Wang, & Kwo, 2014). Other learners may enter the same primary school with limited or no prior education in English. This is increasingly common, with a large number of cross-border and newly arrived students from Mainland China (Chan & Gao, 2014). This difference could affect teachers' beliefs about homework and the type of homework they assign. Parents' beliefs about homework may also vary.

Teachers' views of students' learning styles and ability to study may also influence their beliefs. Vatterott (2014) argues that teachers often do not trust learners and therefore 'prescribe one method of learning, assign one task as homework, and simply require students to comply and voila, learning occurs. Except when it doesn't' (pp. 39–40). If teachers believe their students will not study independently, this may lead them to set homework to compel students to study. It may also lead them to assign homework that has a written product so that teachers have evidence that students have completed the task.

Students' own beliefs about homework may also impact on teachers. A study of third-grade students in one school in the USA (Xu & Corno, 1998) found that students could see the benefits of homework on helping them better understand their lessons; however, the overriding reason given for completing homework was to gain approval from their parents and teachers. This was also found to be the case in two later small-scale studies, also in the USA (Xu & Yuen, 2003; Xu,

2005). These views may conflict with teachers' intentions when assigning homework, as students will possibly not see the benefit of doing homework and instead do it only because they have been told to do it and to gain the approval of their teachers and parents. Warton (2001) found that second graders in the US tended to do homework to avoid getting in trouble.

If teachers have a greater understanding of students' homework experiences, they can improve the quality and relevance of homework and lessen the homework problems that students experience (Hong, Wan & Peng, 2011). However, Hong et al. (2011), in a comparison of students' and teachers' perceptions towards homework in Mainland China, found that, with regard to English language homework, 'students consistently perceived themselves as having more homework problems than did teachers' (p. 282).

Tam and Chan (2011) found that students had negative feelings about homework because it was 'imposed by external authorities' (p. 578). They argued that teachers and schools should 'consider students' preference for imagination and peer collaboration and adults' support for thinking and reading when designing homework' (p. 577). Students have been shown to prefer interesting and varied assignments instead of mechanical effort in writing and copying (Cheung, Hong, & Ip, 2000; Sharp et al., 2001; Tam & Chan, 2011). Despite the negative perceptions of many and the lack of purpose uncovered in previous studies, other research has found that Chinese primary students in particular (compared to Japanese and American students) perceive homework to be important, useful and enjoyable (Chen & Stevenson, 1989).

Parents obviously have a vested interest in their children's education. They will have expectations and views about learning that may differ from those of teachers and may impact on their practices. Ebbeck (1996) found that Chinese parents wanted their children to be given large amounts of homework. Chinese parents perceive the opportunities for additional practice and review provided by homework as a useful contribution to students' achievement at school. In Hong Kong, parents support the use of homework as a learning strategy (Education Department and Committee on Home–School Cooperation, 1994). Hong, Wan and Peng (2011), in their study of secondary school students and teachers in Mainland China, reported that not only did Chinese teachers assign a larger amount of homework than British teachers but Chinese parents themselves were vocal in their insistence that their children be given a lot of homework to do.

Tam and Chan (2010), in their Hong Kong–based study of the perceptions and experiences of the parents of primary school children in relation to their involvement in homework, found that parents 'considered homework an essential part of schooling' (p. 363). They found that 'homework was perceived by parents to fulfil learning functions, mainly including consolidating learning, preparation for tests and examinations and learning skills development' (p. 387). In another study, Tam and Chan (2010) found that only 9.2% of primary students and 0.4% of parents preferred to have no homework, with the majority of parents expecting their children to do more than an hour of homework per day. One parent in their study went so far as to say, 'What is the point of going to school if there is no homework?' (Tam & Chan, 2010, p. 363).

Tam and Chan (2010) attributed parents' positive perceptions of homework to Chinese culture, stating that 'Chinese people believe that intensive drilling and practice provided through homework assignments enhances children's academic performance' (p. 361). As well as advancing parents' goals for their children, homework is also seen as an 'avenue through which parents could assist in their children's multifaceted growth' (p. 366). Parents feel they can have an impact on their child's education and future through helping with homework tasks. Parents believe that homework is related to their child's future success (Tam & Chan, 2010).

3.8 Summary

In the literature review, drawing on the existing literature on the subject of homework, I have presented our current understanding regarding teachers' homework practices and teachers' beliefs about the effectiveness of homework. Homework appears to be a practice that is commonly expected of teachers worldwide (OECD, 2014). However, it is evident that the benefits of homework for young learners is far from clear and that the assignment of homework can even impair student motivation and interest (Rudman, 2014). The literature has also shown that teachers have been found to play a key role in the homework practices prevalent in various international contexts (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). Despite the lack of evidence regarding the benefits of homework, teachers, parents and students tend to view homework in a positive light, believing it to bring advantages for various reasons (Vatterott, 2009), with English language scholars viewing homework as essential to English language learning (Thornbury, 2006; Painter, 2004). Teachers' practices and beliefs have been found to be influenced by various sociocultural and contextual factors (Borg, 2003). The

review reveals that, although a few studies have focused on homework in Hong Kong (Moorhouse, 2018a; Tam & Chan, 2010, 2011; 2016), we still have a limited understanding of the current practices and beliefs of primary school English teachers in Hong Kong and the factors influencing those practices and beliefs.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

In the previous chapter, the existing literature regarding homework was reviewed, providing the conceptual framework for this study while exposing the limitations of our understanding and the gap this study intends to help fill. In this chapter, I introduce the philosophical underpinnings of the study along with its theoretical framework, research design, methods, data analysis, ethical considerations and trustworthiness and transparency.

4.1 Philosophical Underpinnings

At the commencement of a research project, it is important to carefully examine the philosophical underpinnings that guide the researcher and the paradigm the research is positioned within. As a former English language teacher and current teacher educator, my research aim is to ensure that English language students can reach their full potential and fulfil their learning needs as well as improve the learning experience of all learners through the dissemination of knowledge to a larger audience. These aims guide all of my decisions and have sparked my desire to explore the concerns I have in relation to the education system in Hong Kong. My views echo those of Gage (1989):

> Educational research is no mere spectator sport, no mere intellectual game, no mere path to academic tenure and higher pay, not just a way to make a good living and even become a big shot. It has moral obligations. The society that supports us cries out for better education for its children. (p. 10)

Although Gage wrote this in 1989, I believe that it remains true today. We ought to continually strive to improve the education of the next generation while being aware that education is part of the social world and is therefore socially and contextually bound.

There are various approaches and methodologies we can use when conducting educational research; however, when selecting the methodology, it is important for us to keep in mind both our broad views of the purpose of the research as well as our own beliefs regarding knowledge and reality. My recognition of the need to better education for our children (Gage, 1989) is what led me to conceive of this research in the first place. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) suggested that ontological assumptions give rise to epistemological assumptions; these give rise to methodological considerations, and these in turn give rise to issues of instrumentation and data collection. As can be seen by my rationale for this study, my ontological and epistemological assumptions are informed by the interpretivist paradigm.

Interpretivist researchers believe that reality and truth are constructed by the relationships between people in society. This constructivist perspective takes a subjective view of knowledge (Richards, 2003). Knowledge and truth are seen as created rather than discovered. Interpretivist researchers are concerned with the individual and how he or she views reality. As a consequence, the paradigm accepts the existence of multiple realities (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Through interpretative research, researchers aim to understand and investigate why something is the way it is in the specific context: 'They begin with individuals and set out to understand the world around them' (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 18).

They understand that the world is complex and composed of individuals with different interpretations and that knowledge is constructed through the interactions of these individuals (Richards, 2003). This is a marked departure from the perspective of positivist researchers, who view the social world as akin to the natural world, governed by laws that we can discover only through observation and experimentation (Cohen et al., 2011). Positivists are realists, believing that reality is fixed and that there is a single, discoverable truth. Knowledge is therefore separate from the context from which it emanates (Bettis & Gregson, 2001). While interpretivist researchers may be informed by quantitative methods, qualitative research methods predominate (Cohen et al., 2011).

Homework as a pedagogical practice can be seen as socioculturally dependent and context dependent (Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Lantolf, 2000; Hallam, 2004; Rudman, 2014). This means that the study of teachers' practices and beliefs naturally fit into the interpretivist paradigm. My research design (described below) is consistent with this paradigm.

4.2 Theoretical Framework – Sociocultural Theory

Consistent with the philosophical underpinning of this study and the interpretivist paradigm, which sees reality and truth as human constructs (Richards, 2003), the study is informed by sociocultural theory (Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Lantolf, 2000).

The main premise of sociocultural theory is that human thought is mediated through both symbolic (e.g., art, music and language) and physical artefacts

created by human culture, which can be modified and passed on to subsequent generations (Lantolf, 2000). The sociocultural theory of mind was originally conceptualised by Vygotsky, who stated that 'any higher mental function was external and social before it was internal' (Vygotsky, 1960, p. 67). Vygotsky argued that human thoughts and conceptions are formed by our social activities and interactions (Lantolf & Johnson, 2007). Therefore, our cognitions are understood not as fixed but as 'an interactive process, mediated by culture, context, language, and social interactions' (Johnson & Golombek, 2011, p. 1).

When considering teachers' beliefs and practices, sociocultural theory would suggest that teachers ground their understandings and actions in their own experiences as learners (Lortie, 1975) and interactions within social groups, for instance, with other teachers. For example, if English language teachers believe that homework had benefited them as learners of English, they will assume that it would benefit their students. Furthermore, if assigning homework is a common cultural practice passed down from previous generations, then they will continue the practice, viewing it as integral to the role of a teacher. It will be considered as common sense or an 'everyday concept' (Johnson & Golombek, 2011, p. 2) formed through their experiences as learners and then as teachers within their cultural and social environment.

Therefore, teachers will have varying conceptions and practices depending on the nature of the culture and society within which they grew up. This is one of the principal rationales for conducting research in different cultures and societies. It is also often seen as a barrier to the implementation of 'theoretically and pedagogically sound instructional practices' developed through research

(Johnson & Golombek, 2011, p. 2), with teachers instead following 'tried and trusted' approaches from their own experiences or social groups (Brock et al., 2007).

It is important, therefore, when researching practices and beliefs, to consider findings within the sociocultural context in which they originate. We should not just ask what teachers' practices and beliefs are but also examine the possible influences on these practices and beliefs and how they fit within the sociocultural context.

Framing this study within sociocultural theory means exploring the topic through the complex relationships between actions and beliefs and the factors that influence these, including other stakeholders within the educational context, such as students, parents, textbook publishers, teacher educators, senior teachers and policymakers. This requires relating the pedagogical practices of homework as experienced by teachers to the cultural, institutional and historical context in Hong Kong (Wertsch, Tulviste, & Hagstrom, 1993). I believe sociocultural theory also fits well with the exploratory nature of this study, which was conducted in the hope that it would lead to a conceptual understanding of the pedagogical practice of homework that can contribute to the field.

4.3 Research Design

This is an exploratory study focusing on the homework practices and beliefs of primary school English language teachers in Hong Kong. The research examines the homework practices and beliefs of Hong Kong English language teachers between February 2017 and June 2017. As this study investigates teachers'

homework practices and beliefs and the relationship between them within the sociocultural context of Hong Kong, a mixture of methods was considered to provide the best means of exploring the issue. First, quantitative research methods were used to gather an overview of primary English language teachers' homework practices and beliefs. Qualitative research methods were then used to explore the ways in which teachers saw these beliefs as affecting their practices and to identify other factors that may be affecting their beliefs and practices.

Throughout, it was seen as important to include teachers' voices in the study to provide a more nuanced understanding of the issues being explored. Mixed methods studies involve the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data (Dörnyei, 2007). This kind of research can help provide a fuller understanding of the research subject as well as providing the possibility that one method can help verify the other(s) (Sandelowski, 2003). As Mertens (2005) notes, this can be useful in the exploration of a complex educational context. According to what Johnson and Turner (2003) call the 'fundamental principles of mixed methods research', researchers should collect multiple data using different strategies, approaches and methods so as to result in 'complementary strengths and no overlapping weaknesses' (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007 p. 51).

The study will provide a better picture of teachers' practices and beliefs, supported by relevant methodological choices, to address the following research questions:

    RQ1: What are Hong Kong primary English language teachers' homework practices?

RQ2: What beliefs do English language teachers have regarding assigning homework to young English language learners?

RQ3: What factors affect English language teachers' practices and beliefs?

4.4 Methods

Data for this study were collected in two stages between February and June 2017. Stage 1 consisted of a postal survey collecting both quantitative and qualitative data on teachers' practices and beliefs, addressing RQ1 and RQ2, and was conducted between February and March 2017. Stage 2 involved two data collection methods – interviews and samples of homework assigned by teachers to their students – and was conducted between May and June 2017. This provided qualitative data to help answer RQ3 as well as additional data for RQ1 and RQ2. Table 1 provides an overview of the methods used, types of data collected, analysis techniques utilised, and research questions addressed in each stage.

A description of the methods used in each stage of the study, including the rationale, piloting procedures, design of the research tools and participants, follows.

Table 1

Overview of the Methods, Type of Data Collected, Analysis Techniques and the Research Questions Addressed

Stage	Research Questions	Methods	Type of data collected	Analysis

1	What are Hong Kong primary English language teachers' homework practices?	Survey	QUAN/ QUAL	QUAN/ QUAL
	What beliefs do English language teachers have regarding assigning homework to young English language learners?			
2	What are Hong Kong primary English language teachers' homework practices?	Interviews and samples of homework assigned by teachers to their students	QUAL	QUAN/ QUAL
	What beliefs do English language teachers have regarding assigning homework to young English language learners?			
	What factors affect English language teachers' practices and beliefs?			

4.5 Stage 1 – Survey

A survey is a common data collection method in educational research. Cohen et al. (2011) described the purpose of a survey as being to 'gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions or identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared or determining the relationships that exist between specific events' (p. 256). The method has a number of advantages that make it well suited for this study: it can represent a wide target population, gather standardised information and be generalised to the target population (Morrison, 1993). As Cohen et al. (2011) noted, surveys can be useful for collecting factual information as well as beliefs. This will allow for a detailed description of English language teachers' practices and beliefs in relation to homework.

As indicated in the literature review in Chapter 3, one earlier study conducted in Hong Kong looked at primary English language teachers' homework practices (Moorhouse, 2018a), while another examined all primary teachers' conceptions of homework (Tam & Chan, 2016). The first study was a small-scale exploratory study involving 89 teachers from 22 schools. It used a non-probability design with convenience sampling. Although the study had some useful findings, its small scale and the limited piloting of the research tool hampered the generalisability of the findings. The study did not explore teachers' beliefs about homework. The study by Tam and Chan (2016) involved the collection of questionnaire data from 317 teachers in 36 government, subsidised and private primary schools in Hong Kong. The recruitment method is not specified. The authors developed a questionnaire for the purposes of the study. It contained seven items related to teachers' homework preferences and twelve items regarding the perceived functions of homework. The study does not include a copy of the questionnaire. Although the study provides some important insights into teachers' beliefs about homework in Hong Kong (see Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion), it is not restricted to English language teachers, instead sampling all primary teachers, and the sampling method is unclear (Cohen et al, 2011).

This highlights the importance of conducting the present survey. To my knowledge, no large-scale survey has examined Hong Kong English language teachers' homework practices or beliefs.

4.5.1 Survey Sampling

In interpretive research, it is common to utilise more than one kind of sampling. Details of the second stage are provided below. Stage 1 of this study used a non-

probability design to maximise the response rate and number of potential participants (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). Participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling. This design helps counter issues around the accessibility of the target participants (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). As the target participants work in schools, it can be challenging to gain access to them through the use of random sampling.

During the 2016/2017 school year (the year in which the data were collected), there were 575 primary schools in Hong Kong (EDB, 2018). Of these, 532 were aided or government schools and a further 43 were ESF and other private or international schools (see Chapter 2 for details of the different school types). The 43 ESF and other private and international schools were excluded from the study as these schools:

- implement the International Baccalaureate curriculum and are exempt from the Hong Kong education guidelines;
- usually operate a class teacher–based system rather than a subject-based system.
- often hire a large number of expatriate teachers who have grown up in different educational contexts (Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2015).

This left 532 schools that employed English language teachers who met the requirements of this study. Dörnyei & Taguchi (2009) considered a sample size of 1–10% of the population to be the 'magic sampling fraction' (p. 62). Assuming that all English language teachers in the selected schools participated, this would have led to a target sample size of between 5 and 53 schools (although not all schools are the same size with most primary schools in Hong Kong carrying from

6 to 36 classes). Consequently, I targeted English language teachers working at 40 schools and aimed to collect 250 questionnaires.

4.5.2 Participant Recruitment and Survey Distribution

To recruit participants, I contacted all of the English language teachers I knew, asking them whether they would be interested in participating in the study and whether they could recruit others to participate. This snowball design allowed me to use a small network of contacts to reach a larger sample (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation verbally, in my initial written correspondence (via e-mail or an instant messaging platform) and in the consent form (Appendix 1). Although the sampling method does not provide a fully representative sample, it made the study feasible and provided a 'reasonably' representative sample (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009) by providing access to a larger sample size.

Once the participants had agreed to participate, the questionnaire along with the consent form was posted to the participants' schools (along with additional questionnaires, if the participant had agreed to recruit other participants). Any uncompleted questionnaires could be returned with the completed ones. The consent form included a self-nomination option for the second stage of the research study (see Ethical Consideration section). The following strategies were used to maximise the response rate:

- Convenience sampling was used with a snowball design. I contacted English language teachers I knew and invited them to participate as well as invite their colleagues or other English language teachers they knew.

They were all made aware of their anonymity and that their participation was voluntary.

- A detailed cover note and consent form were included to show the scope and purpose of the study (Appendix 1).

- The survey was incentivised. Participants were given a coffee voucher for completing the questionnaire. Although incentives can be problematic, that is, participants may only complete the questionnaire for the reward, the practice is common in social research (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009).

- A stamped, pre-addressed envelope was included (Cohen et al., 2011).

- For ease of completion, the questionnaire was concise and user friendly with an estimated completion time of approximately 30 minutes (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009).

4.5.3 Questionnaire Development

My questionnaire was challenging to design. As Dörnyei (2007) notes, it is easy to construct a questionnaire; however, it is not easy to construct a reliable and valid questionnaire. Reliability is a criterion of a quality study; it involves the researcher putting in place processes, such as piloting, to ensure consistency in participants' interpretation of the questions or items and that these questions or items are free from error (Nunan & Bailey, 2009; Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). Validity is concerned with generalisability to the wider population and whether the item measures what it is supposed to measure (Nunan & Bailey, 2009; Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). These requirements necessitated both time and a systematic approach to the design of the questionnaire. Before the design process could begin, it was necessary to answer questions in relation to each element of the

survey, including whether the questions ought to be open-ended or closed, the optimal rating scale to utilise, the best way in which to mitigate bias, and so forth.

Below, I will discuss the initial questionnaire draft as well as the different steps used to help increase the validity of the questionnaire, including a pilot phase.

4.5.3.1 First Draft of the Questionnaire

The initial questionnaire was constructed on the basis of a brainstorming session focused on all of the questions that I had in mind about the homework practices and possible beliefs of English language teachers in Hong Kong from my own experience of working as a primary school teacher and teacher educator. I then referred to my literature review and the context and noted down points I wanted to explore by means of the questionnaire. My initial questions and ideas were organised into categories and subcategories, resulting in a draft questionnaire of roughly 200 items. I revised and edited the questionnaire, removing duplicates and increasing its readability and 'doability'. The result was a questionnaire consisting of five sections, all containing closed questions, except for Section E, which solicited general comments. The majority of the sections made use of five- or six-part Likert scales, a common scaling technique (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009) and one with which teachers in Hong Kong are likely familiar (Table 2 briefly describes each section).

Table 2

A Brief Description of Each Section of the First Draft of the Questionnaire

Part A	Demographic information about the participant, including age, gender, years of teaching experience, seniority, grades taught and other subjects

	taught. This will help contextualise the findings and make it easier for the reader to judge the generalisability of the findings.
Part B	Information about teachers' homework practices, such as the amount of homework assigned, its intended purposes, types of homework tasks and homework routines. Two items required participants to record the number of homework tasks assigned and the estimated time required for students to complete the work. The other items required participants to respond on a Likert scale measuring frequency of agreement.
Part C	Information on participants' beliefs about homework, particularly in relation to English learning and teaching. All statements required respondents to indicate their agreement with given statements.
Part D	Information on factors the participants considered as affecting their homework practices and beliefs.
Part E	Further comments regarding participants' homework practices or beliefs.

Once the questionnaire had been completed, the sections and items were cross-referenced with my research questions to limit omissions in the questionnaire and ensure that all items were helpful in answering my research questions (see Table 3) (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). The initial questionnaire contained 85 items.

Table 3

Overview of the First Questionnaire Draft

Section	Title	No. of Items	Question Type	Research Question Addressed
A	About you	7	Closed (tick box)	1, 2, 3

B	Homework practices	38	Closed (numerical and Likert)	1
C	Homework beliefs	27	Closed (Likert)	2
D	Influences on practices and beliefs	12	Closed (Likert)	3
E	Comments	1	Open	1, 2

Note. A total of 85 items.

4.5.3.2 Piloting

Piloting is an integral part of any survey-based research (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). Nunan and Bailey (2009) compare it to 'a dress rehearsal in the theatre' (p. 145). It can help the researcher locate any confusing items and unclear instructions and confirm whether it achieves its purpose (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). Piloting should take place in at least two stages, including an initial pilot and pilot (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). This questionnaire underwent a three-stage pilot process.

Initial Piloting

The initial pilot was conducted between 15 and 30 October 2016. I asked my supervisors to review the questions and layout and sought feedback from four experienced teacher educators familiar with the target population and topic in relation to the questionnaire's face validity. Assessments of face validity provide a subjective view of the appropriateness, sensibility and relevance to the research questions of survey questions and items (Holden, 2010). The

questionnaire was modified based on this feedback. A number of changes were made to the questionnaire design and content. The overall design of the questionnaire was streamlined and clarified, and section headings were revised for appropriateness. The language and terminology were revised for improved clarity in the Hong Kong teaching context. For instance, the term 'senior teacher' was replaced with APSM (a well-known official Hong Kong initialism for Assistant Primary School Master/Mistress). Items that were ambiguous or irrelevant were amended or removed (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). The Likert scale for each section was standardised for clarity and simplicity. The number of items was reduced from 85 to 57, improving the survey's 'doability'. Table 4 shows the structure of the questionnaire following the initial pilot.

Table 4

Overview of the Second Questionnaire Draft

Section	Title	No. of Items	Question Type	Research Question Addressed
A	About you	8	Closed (tick box)	1, 2, 3
B	Homework practices	25	Closed (numerical and Likert)	1
C	Homework beliefs	14	Closed (Likert)	2
D	Influences on practices and beliefs	9	Closed (Likert)	3
E	Comments	1	Open	1, 2, 3

Note. A total of 57 items.

First Pilot

To ensure the pilot achieves its desired purpose, it should be conducted with a group similar or identical to the target population (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). I distributed the pilot questionnaire to my 28 part-time Postgraduate Diploma of Education (primary –English) students. This group consists of teachers and teaching assistants working in Hong Kong primary schools and training to be English language teachers. They are therefore similar to the target population. The questionnaires were distributed at the end of a class in October 2016, and the group was asked to return the completed surveys the following week by placing them in an unmarked box at the back of the classroom. This approach was taken to ensure the students felt no pressure to participate: They were made aware of the voluntary nature of their participation both verbally and on the written consent form. Of the 28 questionnaires distributed, 10 were returned. Based on the responses, the following changes were made to the questionnaire:

- After observing a preference among the participants for selecting 'neutral' responses on the Likert scale, I decided to remove the 'neutral' option to compel participants to make a definitive judgement about the statements, as the items concern practices and beliefs.
- Some closed questions were clarified to provide additional context.
- The comment section was separated to gather participants' responses separately.
- Four participants missed two of the items, so these items were made more prominent.

- After a discussion with my supervisors, Section D, regarding the influences on teachers' beliefs, was changed from closed Likert-scale items to two open-ended questions. It was decided that the influences are very broad and that it may therefore not be appropriate or adequate to evaluate them using closed questions. These influences were further explored in Stage 2 of this study through interviews.
- Section E was removed.

The revised questionnaire consisted of 56 items divided into four sections (see Table 5 for an overview).

Table 5

Overview of the Third Questionnaire Draft

Section	Title	No. of Items	Question Type	Research Question Addressed
A	About you	8	Closed (tick box)	1, 2, 3
B	Homework practices	28	Closed (numerical and Likert)	1
C	Homework beliefs	18	Closed (Likert)	2
D	Influences on practices and beliefs	2	Open	3

Second Pilot

As a number of changes had been made following the first pilot, a second pilot was warranted. This was conducted in January 2017 with ten Year Four and Year Five Bachelor of Art and Bachelor of Education (BA and BEd) English language majors from my university who had recently completed an eight-week practicum at a primary school. Ten questionnaires were handed out, following the same procedure as used in the first pilot, and ten were returned. However, to obtain a better idea of the pilot participants' thoughts while completing the questionnaire, I asked participants to make comments while completing it. Further changes were made following analysis of their responses and comments:

- It was observed that the removal of the 'neutral' option did compel participants to make judgements.

- Some items were further clarified to improve their readability and comprehensibility.

- One additional item was added to each of Sections B and C to allow for additional open-ended responses from participants, and the Section D item was modified.

- In this pilot, different participants' responses were compared. The items were observed to have worked as intended (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009).

4.5.3.3 The Final Questionnaire

After the second pilot was completed and the results analysed, the final questionnaire was produced and delivered to the intended participants (see Appendix 2). The survey was conducted between 1 February and 31 March 2017 (Table 6 shows the final questionnaire structure).

Table 6

Overview of the Final Questionnaire

Section	Title	No. of Items	Question Type	Research Question Addressed
A	About you	8	Closed (tick box)	1, 2, 3
B	Homework practices	31	29 closed (numerical and Likert) 2 open questions	1
C	Homework beliefs	19	18 closed (Likert) 1 open question	2
D	Influences on practices and beliefs	2	Open	3

Note. A total of 60 items.

4.5.4 Survey Response Rate and Processing the Returned Questionnaires

In total, 325 questionnaires were distributed with 290 completed questionnaires returned from teachers working at 48 different schools. This was more than I had intended. Ten uncompleted questionnaires were returned. A total of 25 questionnaires were not returned, giving a response rate of 89%. I believe the high response rate was due to the sampling method, length of the questionnaire and incentive provided. I had sent out more questionnaires than I intended, as I assumed less would be returned.

It is important to process the questionnaire data systematically to ensure the data is accurate (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). Closed-questions were coded with a numerical score – for instance, Male 1, Female 2 – with each predetermined response on the Likert scale being assigned a number. I then manually keyed the data into an Excel file. Responses to open-questions were entered verbatim. During the process, any missing data were left blank. After all the data were entered, the data were checked for mistakes (both errors introduced by myself during entry and those introduced by respondents). Implausible and/or missing data were examined and rectified, and missing or incomplete data were removed from the data set (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). Implausible data included those from participants who gave the same Likert scale rating to all responses. The data set was reduced to 279 valid responses after processing. For transparency, the number of valid responses is presented alongside the data in the findings.

4.5.5 Survey Data Analysis

As this is an exploratory study and the aim of the questionnaire was to collect data to answer research questions 1 and 2, descriptive statistics were used for the quantitative data collected (Cohen et al., 2011; Nunan & Bailey, 2009). I could then 'analyse and interpret what the descriptions mean' (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 622). Written responses to open questions were coded, and themes were identified using a content analysis approach under the main headings of the questionnaire (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009).

Quantitative data can be analysed in a variety of ways (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). The technique selected should best represent the data collected. As this study seeks to describe the target group, it was deemed appropriate to analyse the data

using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics include frequencies, central tendencies (mean, mode and median) and dispersions about the mean (range, standard deviation and variance) (Cohen et al., 2011; Nunan & Bailey, 2009). As the questionnaire required participants to respond on a Likert scale, the frequency and percentages of participants' responses offered the most appropriate way to analyse and present the data (Cohen et al., 2011), while means were calculated for other responses.

In relation to the qualitative data, each open-ended question was initially reviewed and scanned, with themes being developed based on the research questions. Responses were highlighted and categorised under the emerging themes within a Word file using identifiers (see Appendix 3 for an example). These themes were then reduced in number, and specific comments were selected to illustrate the principal themes (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). The findings were later combined with the stage two findings and presented together in Chapter five (See section 4.9).

4.6 Stage 2 – Interviews and Homework Samples

The second stage of the study involved semi-structured interviews and the collection of samples of homework assigned by the interviewees. As with questionnaires, interviews are a common data collection method which help us see knowledge as 'generated between humans, often through conversation' (Cohen et al., 2011). As Tuckman (1999) noted, an interview provides access to what is 'inside a person's head, makes it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences), and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs)' (p. 237). Interviews allow for greater personalisation than questionnaires and make it possible to

probe deeper into the issue or experience being explored (Cohen et al., 2011). As beliefs can be complex, the combination of methods can help us attain a clearer picture of participants' beliefs and the factors that affect those beliefs. I chose to conduct the interviews after the questionnaire as analysis of the questionnaire data provided themes and points to draw on during the interviews (Ary, Jacobs, Irvine, & Walker, 2018). For instance, school policy and parental expectations emerged as reasons for giving homework in the questionnaire. These were then included as questions for discussion during the interviews. Interviews were used to collect data to address RQ3 while providing greater insight into RQ1 and RQ2.

As is the case with questionnaires, interviews come in many different formats, structures and types depending on the researcher's purpose and the target participants. Interviews can take the form of informal conversations, use the interview guide approach, or be standardised and open-ended or closed and quantitative. Each of these interview types has different characteristics, strengths and weaknesses (Cohen et al., 2011).

The interview guide approach, also known as the semi-structured interview, involves the development of a guide to help structure the interview. Certain topics and themes are specified in advance, thereby providing a measure of systematic flow to the interview while allowing for a more conversational and situational style, with room for the interviewer to ask follow-up questions (Cohen et al., 2011).

4.6.1 Interview Participant Recruitment

It was decided that a good approach to participant recruitment for the interview would be through self-nomination on the questionnaire consent form. This made it more likely that participants would be interested in participating and already aware of the scope of the study. Survey participants were asked to include their e-mail addresses on the consent form if they agreed to a follow-up interview. In total, 35 survey participants stated that they would be willing to be interviewed. These respondents were e-mailed in April 2017 to provide more information about the interview, such as its purpose and estimated duration, and to confirm that it would be audio recorded. The e-mail included a request for a suitable time or place for the interview to be conducted at the participants' convenience. Of the 35 respondents who had initially indicated their willingness to be interviewed, 11 respondents, from nine different schools, responded positively. Two of the eleven were selected to be part of the interview pilot, leaving nine participants for the main round.

4.6.2 Interview Guide Development

Drawing on the research questions, literature review and questionnaire data, I developed some initial topics and questions that were designed to meet the research objectives. As with the questionnaire, I attempted to ensure that the design was unbiased and that the questions and prompts did not lead participants to express any particular view. Questions were designed to be open but sufficiently precise to achieve the objectives of the interview. The initial interview schedule included four sections:

1. homework practices;
2. beliefs regarding homework and teachers' homework practices;
3. the relationship between beliefs and practices; and

4. influences on practices and beliefs.

The design was initially relatively structured, with 18 open-ended questions and a few demographic questions. Standardisation increases comparability between participants' responses while providing the opportunity to probe and request further elaboration if interesting responses are provided (Cohen et al., 2011). However, it also reduces the interviewer's flexibility to relate the interview to particular individuals and contexts (Cohen et al., 2011). It was therefore important to pilot the interview guide to ensure it was fit for purpose. An initial pilot and pilot were conducted to help ensure that 'the questions elicit[ed] sufficiently rich data and [did] not dominate the flow of the conversation' (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 137).

4.6.2.1 Interview Guide Piloting

The initial interview guide was sent to my supervisors in April 2017 to solicit their feedback on the type, format and relevance of the questions. The comments of two teacher educators familiar with the local context were also invited. The interview guide was modified based on their responses:

- The section 'Relationship between beliefs and practice' was removed as it was felt that the other sections would adequately address this question.

- Some items were removed, while others were amended to include more open-ended questions.

- A section was added for participants to discuss the homework samples they had provided, including questions about the types of homework they considered to be effective, ineffective and common in the context of English language teaching.

A second interview guide was developed (see Appendix 4). Two of the self-nominated interview participants were invited to participate in the pilot interviews

in early May 2017. One participant chose to be interviewed at her school, while the other chose to be interviewed in a coffee shop. Both interviews were audio recorded using the audio-recording function on my password protected mobile phone and lasted between 40 minutes and one hour. The data were analysed using the method outlined in the Stage 2 – Data Analysis section.

After analysing the pilot data, I concluded that the responses adequately addressed the research questions, the participants seemed to have a clear understanding of the questions, there was room for participants to elaborate and for follow up questions to be asked, and the data were relevant to the RQs (Cohen et al., 2011). On this basis, I determined that the interview guide was fit for purpose and would not require any further changes prior to the main round of interviews. As the pilot provided relevant data and the participants had been selected from the target group, I have included the data collected during the pilot in the findings of this study.

4.6.3 Conducting the Main Interviews

The main interviews were conducted between May and June 2017 with nine English language teachers from eight different primary schools. The interviews were conducted at the participants' schools or a mutually agreed location to ensure that participants felt comfortable and were willing to speak freely. The interviews lasted between 35 minutes and one hour. All interviews were audio recorded to ensure data accuracy. The interview guide was sent to participants by e-mail at least one day in advance of the interviews to ensure that they were comfortable with the areas of questioning. All interviews were conducted in English. My own observations indicated that the interviews seemed relaxed, and

participants appeared willing to speak candidly. The use of semi-structured interviews made it challenging to maintain the structure of the interviews; however, the format did allow for greater flexibility and flow of ideas around specific responses. This reduced the comparability of some responses (Cohen et al., 2011).

4.6.4 Homework Samples

My original intent had been to collect samples of teachers' assigned homework over a period of time. This was to be used to triangulate with the practices to provide a clearer idea of the types of homework English teachers in Hong Kong assign their learners. A similar approach has been used to record learners' out-of-class English language learning habits (Hyland, 2004), but the method has not been used to record the homework teachers assign. However, discussions with various in-service teachers and my supervisors indicated that this approach would require too large a time commitment from participants. After discussion with my supervisors, I decided that a more manageable approach would be for participants to provide examples of the different types of homework they assign and then to discuss these during the interview, particularly those they consider to be effective and ineffective. This would provide a clearer understanding of the practices as well as the teachers' beliefs and other factors affecting their practices. Thus, the interviewees were asked to bring samples of the English language homework they assign their students to the interview. These homework artefacts provided data to help address RQ1 and RQ2, particularly the sources of homework activities, types of homework activities, purpose of the homework and teachers' beliefs regarding these practices, while presenting a shared context for discussion during the interview.

4.7 Interview Data Analysis

As Cohen et al. (2011) noted, 'In qualitative data the data analysis here is almost inevitably interpretive, hence the data analysis is less a completely accurate representation … but more a reflexive, reactive interaction between the researcher and the decontextualized data that are already interpretations of a social encounter.' (p. 537) The process of analysis must therefore be systematic if it is to provide some degree of rigour. The process should be aimed at preserving the holism of the interview so that participants maintain their individuality but the data remain readable and trends among participants remain identifiable. To this end, I followed the thematic analysis qualitative analytic method proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) as it is flexible and can provide 'a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data' (p. 78). The method includes six phases: familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, search for themes, review of themes, definition and naming of themes, and production of the report.

The first phase, familiarisation with the data, involved transcribing the verbal data verbatim and reading through the transcriptions multiple times. The F5 Transcription Pro (Version 7.01) software was used. This provided me with a decelerated version of the audio recording and included time markers to aid analysis. During this reading and re-reading process, I noted down initial ideas in the margins for later reference (see Appendix 5 for an example).

In the second phase, generating initial codes, I began to code the data in a more systematic way, starting with the broad themes used to structure the interview – 'teachers' practices', 'teachers' beliefs', 'influences on practices' and 'influences

on beliefs' – and then developing sub-themes, for instance, negative beliefs about current practice' (theme) and 'too much mechanical drilling and writing' (emerging sub-theme). These were compiled into a list which was added to and augmented as each subsequent interview was coded (Appendix 6).

In the third and fourth phases, searching for themes and reviewing the themes, data were collated under the emerging themes, and new themes were identified while exploring relationships between the themes. Thematic maps of the analysis were generated showing the connection between the emerging themes and sub-themes organised by RQ (see Figure 1, 2, 3 and 4) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This helps us visualise the data and identify connections, convergences and divergences between participants' responses.

In the fifth phase, defining and naming themes, the themes were further refined by a process of clustering, classifying, modifying and reducing with the final themes emerging. In the sixth phase, extracts from the participants' data sets were selected that illustrated the themes, and the analysis was compared with the research questions and literature. The data were then combined with the stage one data (See section 4.9 Combining Stage One and Stage Two Data).
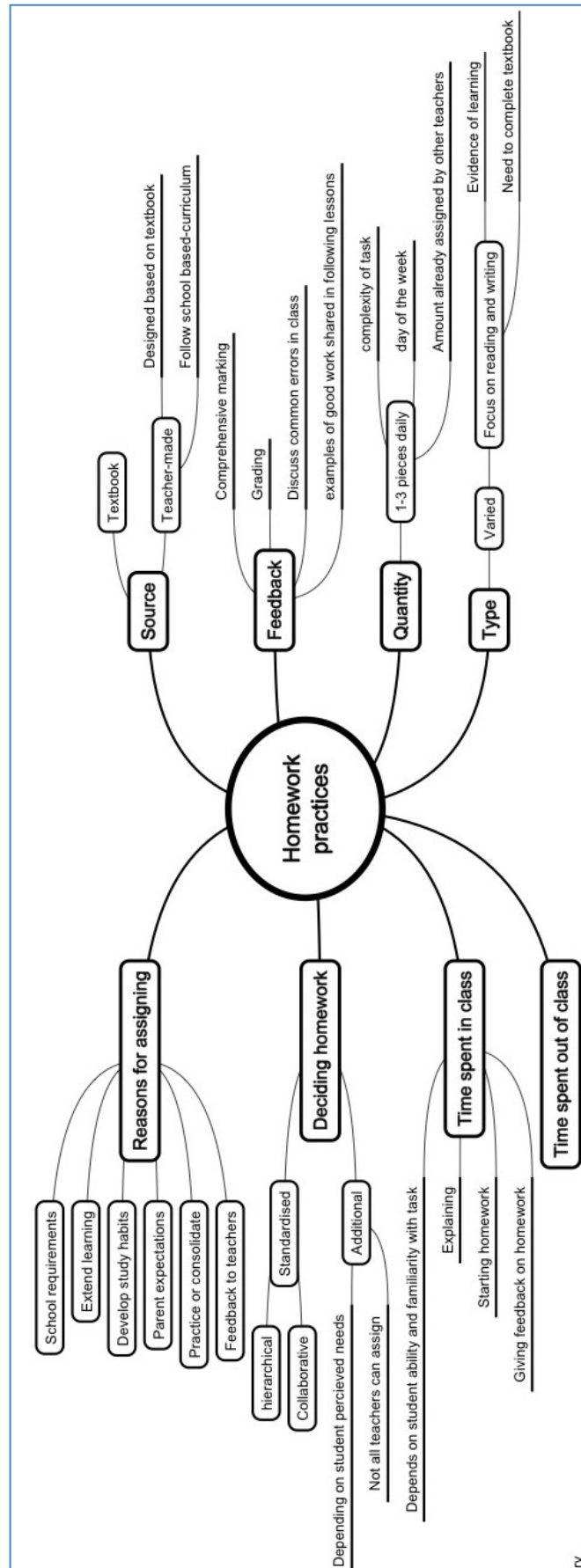
Figure 1. Codes and themes organised by RQ1
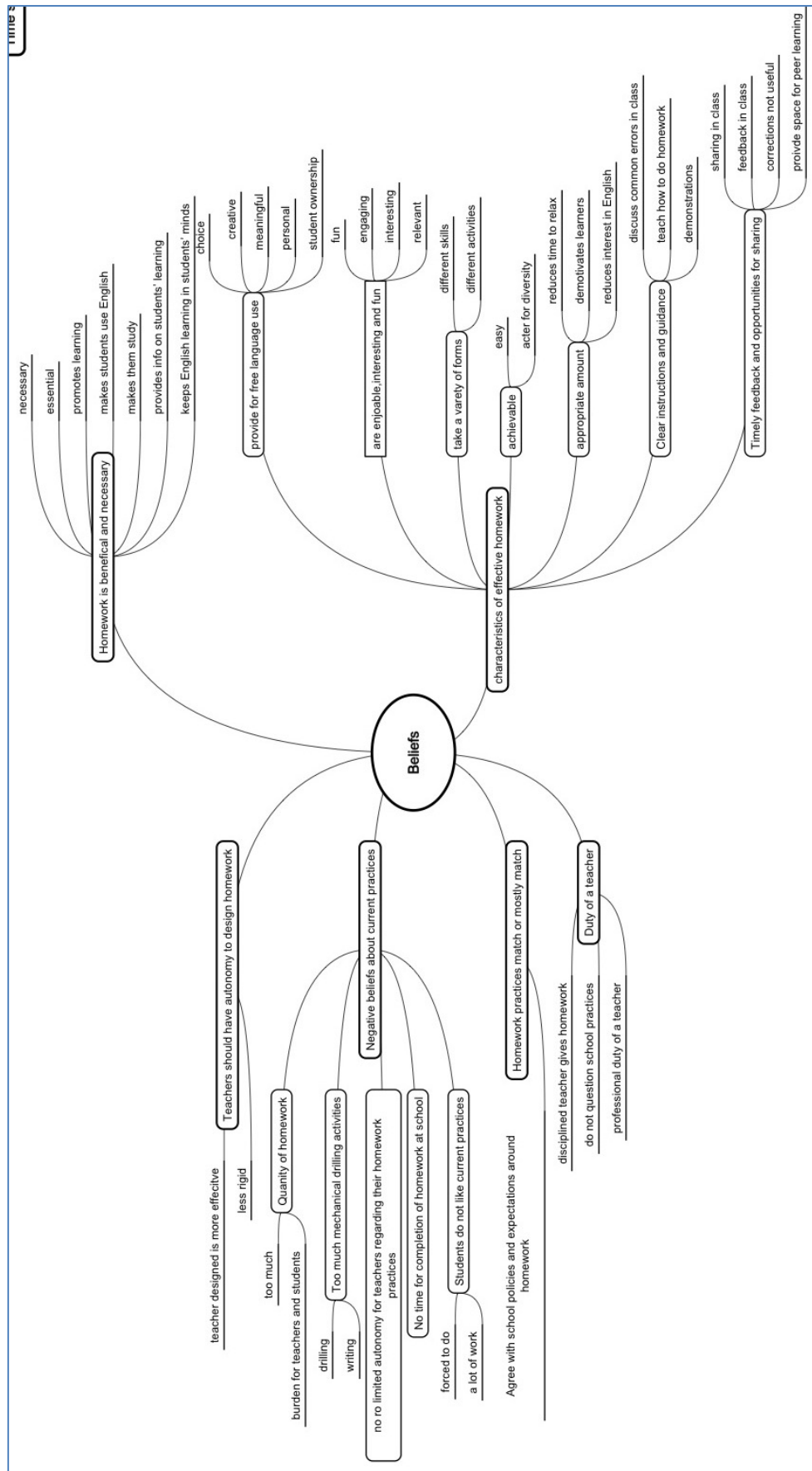
Figure 2. Codes and themes organised by RQ2
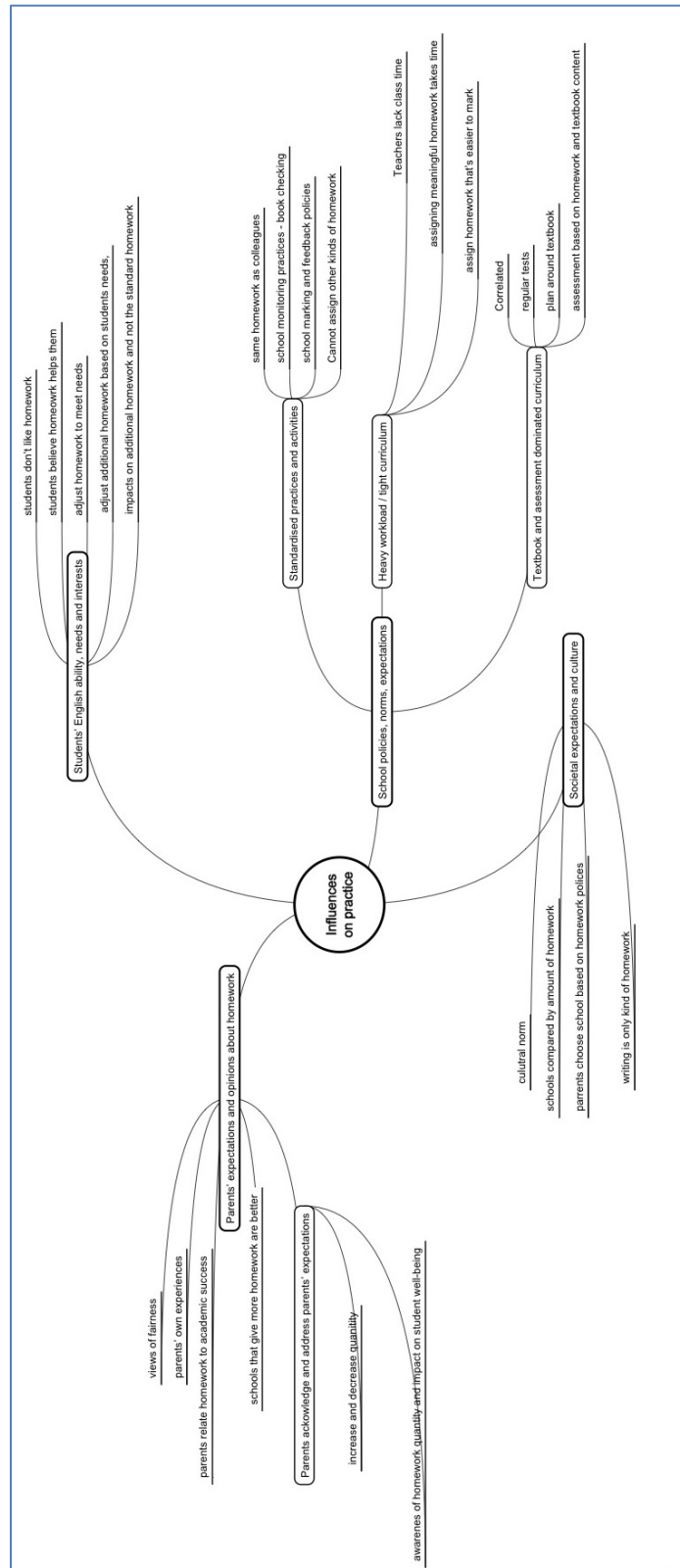
Figure 3. Codes and themes organised by RQ3 – Influnces on practices
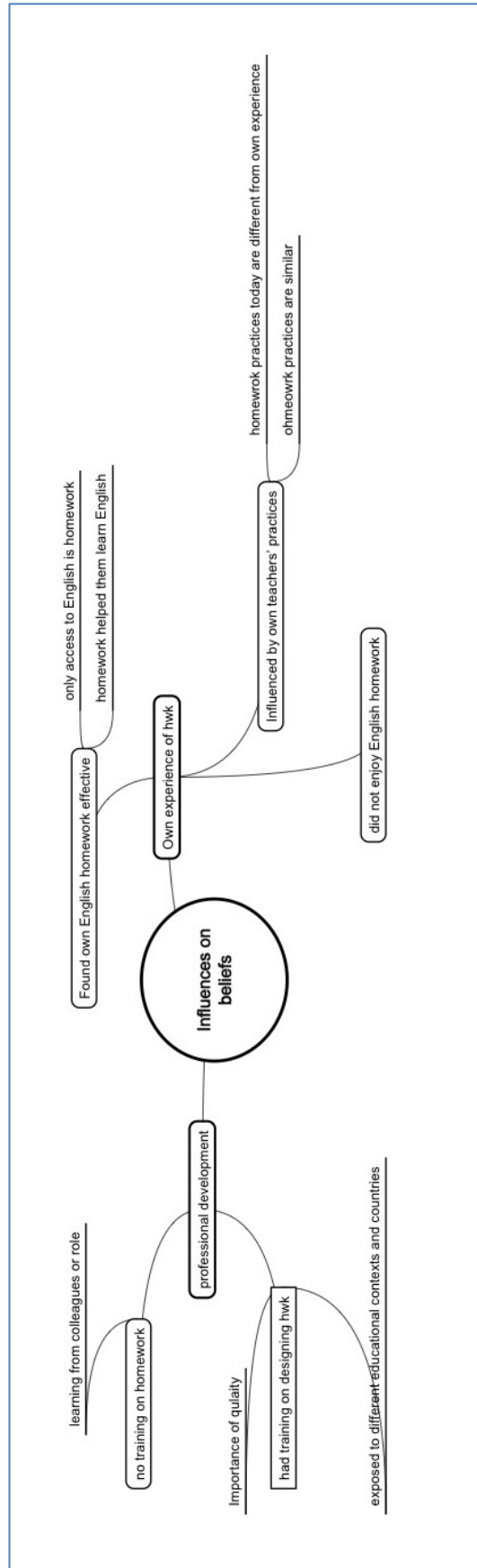
Figure 4. Codes and themes organised by RQ3 – Influnces on beliefs

4.8 Homework Sample Data Analysis

The homework samples were used to help illustrate participants' responses and contextualise the findings. The two pilot participants provided samples, as did seven of the main round interviewees. The samples were analysed by type (e.g., reading comprehension, grammar practice) and source (e.g., teacher-created, textbook) and were compared with teachers' opinions about the efficacy of the homework as a teaching and learning tool, following content analysis procedures (Cohen et al., 2011).

First, the samples were reviewed and categorised on the basis of the titles of the materials. Codes were created based on this initial analysis, and the different materials provided by each participant were categorised and contrasted with each other. If materials contained more than one activity, they were assigned a corresponding number of codes. The materials were then compared to the interview data. The data were tabulated under the themes and are presented in Chapter 5.

4.9 Combining Stage One and Stage Two Data

As this was a two-stage study with stage one and stage two both used to address RQ1 and RQ2 (RQ3 was primarily addressed by stage two), it is important to discuss the processes involved in combining the data sources and show how the final themes presented in Chapter 5 were generated.

By definition, 'mixed methods is a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and "mixing" or integrating both quantitative and qualitative data at some stage of the research process within a single study' (Ivankova, Creswell & Stick, 2006, p.3). There are a number of different research designs in mixed-method research and different stages within the research process where the methods can be 'mixed' (Creswell et al., 2003). This study follows a sequential mixed-method design

(Ivankova et al., 2006) with stage one primarily involving the collection and analysis of quantitative data and some qualitative data (through a survey), while stage two involved the collection and analysis of qualitative (through interviews and collection of homework samples). While there are a number of benefits to the use of more than one data collection method, it does come with added challenges. Such challenges include the priority or weight given to each stage; how and when to collect and analyse the data; and how and at what stage the data are connected and the results are integrated (Creswell et al., 2003).

In this study, as the data sources served to address the RQs in varying degrees, it is important to discuss how the data were integrated in respect to each RQ. For RQ 1, the survey data collected in stage one served as the principle data source; therefore, for most themes, this data was prioritized with the stage two data embedded into the stage one themes (see Appendix 10). However, some themes were only identified in stage two data analysis. These were then presented under these themes in Chapter 5. For RQ2, the findings were harder to prioritize as there were data relevant to some themes in both stages, while other themes only emerged in one stage. It was therefore decided that the data relevant to RQ2 would share equal weighting and be integrated under combined themes. For both RQ1 and RQ2, it was important after the initial analysis of the data in stage one and two that the data were combined. This required comparing, contrasting, modifying and coming to a final decision on the wording and scope of each theme to ensure consistency. This led to the final themes presented in Appendix 11 and the joint presentation of the data in Chapter 5. For RQ3, the majority of the data were collected in stage two with some data coded from the open-responses questions of stage one integrated into the themes generated in the stage two analysis (See Appendix 12).

4.10 Ethical Considerations

It is crucial for researchers to conduct all aspects of their research ethically, honestly and transparently. To ensure this, throughout every stage of this study, I followed both the research code of conduct of the University of Exeter and the relevant Hong Kong laws. I received a certificate of ethical approval from the

University of Exeter to carry out the research in September 2016 (Appendix 7). The University of Exeter's research code of conduct is in line with the British Educational Research Association's (BERA, 2011) guidelines regarding researchers' responsibilities towards participants.

Throughout the study, all participants were informed of the study's aims in writing, in the form of a cover note and consent form (Appendix 1). These forms detailed the rights of the participants to withdraw from the study at any time and assured participants that the data would be kept confidential and that all responses would remain anonymous, but indicated that some demographic information may be used. These assurances facilitated open and honest responses from participants.

Each stage of the research posed its own ethical challenges. In relation to Stage 1, the use of convenience sampling can have ethical issues as participants may feel obliged to participate. To mitigate this concern, I informed participants of the voluntary nature of their participation, provided anonymous ways to return the questionnaire (see the Piloting section) and stored the consent forms and questionnaires separately.

In Stage 2, interviewees were given control over the location of the interview to ensure their comfort. They were made aware that they would be referred to using pseudonyms. They were also given the option to review the transcripts of their interviews and make changes. Four interviewees asked to see their transcripts. None required any changes to be made.

All data were kept in secure locations, either on secure cloud storage or in a locked drawer in a locked office, which were accessible only to me. All data were treated with the utmost respect and care.

4.11 Trustworthiness and Transparency

As this study is positioned within the interpretivist paradigm, it is important to acknowledge that it aims to explore a phenomenon in context. Therefore, it is not appropriate to use the same criteria used in positivist research, such as generalizability, reliability, and objectivity, to judge its quality (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). However, it is essential to demonstrate that the study has been conducted in good faith and that what has been found and presented reflects the phenomenon under study. To judge the quality of interpretivist studies, it is necessary to demonstrate the trustworthiness and transparency of them. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four criteria that we can use to do this: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Creditability is concerned with the plausibility of the information drawn from the participants and it being a correct and fair interpretation of their opinions and views (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To address the creditability criteria, I used three strategies:

1. Triangulation – The study adopted data triangulation and method triangulation. Participants were recruited from different primary schools in Hong Kong, representing various school sizes and geographical locations. In both stages, biographical data were collected from participants regarding their levels of teaching experience, age and qualifications (see Appendix 8 and 9 for demographic information on the survey and interview participants). This allows for cross-school and participant consistency. Method triangulation was achieved through the use of a questionnaire, interviews and samples of homework assigned.
2. Piloting – The survey and interview guide were piloted to ensure they were fit for purpose. The piloting procedures were documented in this chapter.
3. Persistent observations – The data were analysed in three stages. The questionnaire data were analysed, followed by the interview and

homework samples. The data were then combined to generate the final themes presented in the findings chapter. During this process, the data were read and re-read multiple times, analysed and the concepts and themes revised.

Transferability is the degree to which the findings of the study can be transferred to another context or group. In interpretivist research, it is for the reader to judge whether the findings are transferable to their setting. Therefore, it is essential to provide 'thick descriptions of the participants and research process' (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p.122). To address the transferability criteria, I provided a detailed description of the research context, including details of the education system, culture, teachers' roles and the English language (see Chapter 2). Participants' biographical data were collected in both stages of the study (see Appendix 8 and 9). I made an effort to ensure enough information is collected and presented to provide a degree of transferability but also ensure participant anonymity.

Dependability is concerned with the appropriacy of the methods and analysis process for the research questions and design. It is essential to provide a clear account of the research steps and processes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I addressed the dependability of the study by providing a detailed description of the research process earlier in this chapter. This detailed how the tools were developed and how these tools were designed to collect data to address the research questions. Methodology literature (e.g. Ary et al., 2018; Cohen et al., 2011; Dörnyei, 2007) were referenced to ensure the processes adopted were appropriate for the research design and aims.

Confirmability is concerned with the 'neutrality' of the findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p.122). It is important to show that the findings derive from the data and that it is possible for other researchers to be able to confirm the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As has been stated previously, it is important to acknowledge that everyone has an internal bias. In the introduction, I stated that I am interested in this topic of homework and have conceptions about its use with primary learners. That being said, I also understand that for my research to be trustworthy, it is important that I let the 'data speak' and my findings should be 'grounded in the data' (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p.122). To do this, I have included detailed

descriptions of the decisions I made in the methodology chapter and have included copies of the data collection tools and examples of stages of my data analysis in the appendices. In the findings, extracts from the data are used to illustrate the points and allow for transparency between the data and the analysis (Appendix 10,11 and 12 includes additional examples for the final themes).

4.12 Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed description of the methodology used in this study in order to address the research questions. This is intended to evidence the rigorous approach taken to provide data that accurately reflect the practices and beliefs of the participants. Throughout the design, implementation and presentation of this study, every effort was made to ensure strict adhesion to the University of Exeter research code of conduct. In Chapter 5, I present the findings of the data analysis in response to the three research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

This chapter details the findings from the data analysis. The findings are presented in response to the three research questions, drawing from relevant data emerging from the questionnaire, interviews and homework samples.

5.1 Survey Demographics

Survey participants were asked to provide demographic information regarding their gender, age, years of experience, highest qualifications and rank (based on Hong Kong teacher rankings) and were asked to confirm whether they acted as the English panel chair (head of English) at their school. Demographic information is important as it indicates how representative the sample is of the target population (Salkind, 2010) – in this study, English language teachers working in Hong Kong. The demographic information is presented in Appendix 8. It can be seen from Appendix 8 that the majority of respondents (86%) were female. This ratio of female to male teachers reflects the trend in the Hong Kong teaching population (Census and Statistics Department, 2016; Morris & Adamson, 2010). The table shows that a range of ages and teaching experience is represented. In terms of teaching positions, both teachers and senior teachers are represented, with 24% of the participants holding the position of English Panel Chair. This is a relatively high percentage, since each school will have only one teacher holding this position. This may be accounted for by the sampling method, as I know a disproportionate number of English Panel Chairs. The number of degree and master's degree holders is in line with expectations, as Hong Kong has a highly educated teaching force where many teachers choose to complete post-graduate qualifications.

5.2 Interview Demographics

As all interview participants had completed the questionnaire, some demographic information was taken from the questionnaire. During the interview, participants were asked to describe their school (location, size and culture) and students (background, motivation, ability and views towards English). These data help contextualise the findings and provide information on the range of interview participants (see Appendix 9). All information was self-reported.

The table in Appendix 9 indicates that that interviewees come from a variety of different schools by size and location. Students came from a variety of backgrounds and have different levels of motivation and ability. This information will be used in the findings to contextualise the participants' views and opinions. Notably, half of the interviewees were English panel chairs, which is proportionally higher when compared to the survey and target population.

5.2 RQ 1: What are Hong Kong Primary English Language Teachers'

Homework Practices?

This section presents data related to the first research question, 'What are Hong

Kong primary English language teachers' homework practices?' As discussed in

the literature review, little is known about English language teachers' homework

practices (Moorhouse, 2017, 2018a; North & Pillay, 2002). Additional data

extracts for each theme and sub-theme can be found in Appendix 10.

5.2.1 Quantity of Homework Teachers Assign Their Learners

The questionnaire contained two questions regarding the amount of homework

teachers assign to their students each day, including the number of pieces and

how long they expect their learners to spend on English homework each day. All

the respondents, except one, assigned homework to their students daily, with the

majority of respondents assigning two pieces a day (see Table 7).

Table 7

Average Number of Pieces of English Language Homework Assigned Each Day

(N = 273)

Number of pieces of	0	1	2	3	4
homework			*N* (%)		
	1	31	191	46	4
	(<1)	(11)	(70)	(17)	(2)

On a typical day, 45% of respondents expected their students to spend

21–30 minutes on English homework, with 24% expecting them to spend 11–20

minutes and 22% expecting students to spend 31–40 minutes daily (see Table
8).

Table 8

Amount of Time Teachers Expect Students to Spend on English Homework

Every Day (N = 277)

Amount of time	0	1–10	11–20	21–30	31–40	41–50	>51
teachers expect							
students to spend				*N* (%)			
on English	0	5	67	124	61	18	2
homework every	(0)	(2)	(24)	(45)	(22)	(6)	(1)
day (minutes)							

The quantity of homework assigned by teachers was further explored in
the interviews. All 11 interviewees gave homework daily or after each English
lesson (Joan did not have English lessons every day). The amount varied from
one to three pieces depending on various factors, such as the complexity of the
homework task, the day of the week (most teachers tended to assign more
homework on Fridays and before long holidays), students' abilities, and whether
students had received a lot of homework from other subject teachers. However,
these factors were limited by school policies and requirements to assign certain
prescribed or mutually agreed homework. Mary, who said that her school was
'famous for the amount of homework' they assigned, mentioned that additional
homework would be given before weekends and long holidays and that teachers
must assign one piece of homework per day. Thus, for a five-day holiday,
teachers are required to assign five pieces of homework. This was also the case
for Jessi. Her school had standardised homework for long holidays; all students

in the same grade were required to receive the same homework. This holiday homework was compiled into a workbook which students took home on the last day of school and had to hand in, completed, on their return to school after the holiday (these influences on practices are discussed in detail later). Meanwhile, at weekends, it was common for teachers to assign homework they expected to take learners a longer time, such as journal writing.

5.2.2 Purposes of the Homework Teachers Assign

The literature review shows that teachers around the world assign homework for a multitude of reasons (Wiesenthal et al., 1997; Cooper; 1989; North & Pillay; 2002; Vatterott, 2009); as with other studies, these reasons were narrowed done following piloting to make the questionnaire more manageable (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009; Tam & Chan, 2016). To give participants the option to provide other reasons, space was provided below the statements.

The survey results show that the majority of respondents assign homework for all the potential purposes provided (see Table 9). The most commonly given reasons were to 'practice what has been taught in class', with 100% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing, followed by to 'provide information to me of my students' English progress', with 98% agreeing or strongly agreeing. These high levels of agreement suggest that teachers see the benefits of homework as providing students with opportunities to practise and consolidate the skills and knowledge taught in class and providing teachers with insight into their students' advancement.

The assertions that homework served 'to increase out of class peer interaction in English' and 'to help students develop time management skills' received the most negative responses, although the majority of teachers still agreed with these statements. This may relate to the age of the learners as well as the type of homework assigned. The positive responses to all items may be related to the issue of quantity discussed above; with homework being assigned on a daily basis, it is safe to assume that it is targeted at a range of purposes.

Table 9

Purpose of Assigning Homework

I regularly set homework to …	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
	N (%)			
… practice what has been taught in class (*N* = 279)	1 (<1)	0 (0)	88 (31)	190 (69)
… prepare students for upcoming tests or exams (*N* = 279)	2 (1)	9 (3)	180 (65)	88 (31)
… prepare students for upcoming English lessons (*N* = 276)	1 (<1)	19 (7)	224 (81)	32 (11)
… finish work already started in class (*N* = 275)	5 (2)	45 (16)	195 (71)	30 (11)
	1	8	188	81

… apply recently learned material in a different context (N = 278)	(<1)	(3)	(67)	(30)
… help students develop study skills (N = 279)	1	14	197	67
	(<1)	(5)	(71)	(24)
… help students develop time management skills (N = 277)	7	94	160	16
	(2)	(34)	(58)	(6)
… increase out of class peer interaction in English (N = 275)	8	103	151	13
	(3)	(37)	(55)	(5)
… provide information to parents on students' progress (N = 279)	5	31	203	40
	(2)	(11)	(73)	(14)
… provide information to me on my students' English progress (N = 279)	1	6	147	125
	(<1)	(2)	(53)	(45)

In addition to the standard responses provided in the questionnaire, 91 of the 279 valid respondents gave additional reasons for assigning homework. Most of these were duplications of the purposes outlined above, such as 'practice', 'consolidation' or to 'develop study skills'. Additional responses were analysed and coded into three themes:

1. Feedback to students on what they should know / have learnt (N = 6)
2. Parents' expectations (N = 6)
3. School requirements and policies (N = 17)

Additional reasons were provided at the end of the questionnaire. Two hundred and fourteen participants wrote a response to the question, 'Why do you assign English homework?'. These responses were analysed and coded into four themes:

1. Homework is assigned for students to practice or consolidate what they have learnt in English classes (*N* = 112).

2. Homework is assigned to provide feedback on teachers' teaching and/or students' learning (*N* = 74).

3. Homework is assigned due to school requirements (such as school policy and curriculum requirements) (*N* = 44).

4. Homework is assigned due to parents' expectations or to provide evidence to parents of teaching and learning (*N* = 16).

The responses to the open-ended question show similar priority being given to practice, consolidation and the receipt of feedback on teaching and learning as the closed questions. School requirements and parents' expectations had not been included in survey purposes and were therefore further explored in the interview. Interviewees confirmed that they assigned homework to allow students to practice and consolidate what had been learnt and to gain information about their students' learning progress, as this extract shows:

> *I think homework is something to mainly consolidate teaching and learning so because our students are very young, they forget things easily so if they have something that reminds them what they have learned and something that they could keep to, so they can go back to refer back, it would be very helpful I think* (Rachel)

5.2.3 Type of Homework Assigned

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with statements regarding how regularly they assign certain kinds of homework. As with the purposes of homework, 14 statements were given with space for participants to provide additional written information regarding the homework they assign. The types of homework were identified through the literature review, a review of curriculum documents (see Chapter 2) and piloting. Some categories of homework are based on the ways in which students need to complete the homework; others refer to the skills the homework activity focuses on developing and one focuses on the variety of homework tasks. These were discussed during the interviews, and homework samples were provided by nine of the interviewees.

Teachers reported assigning a variety of English homework tasks, with 93% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, 'I regularly assign a variety of English homework tasks' (see Table 10). Teachers reported assigning reading activities (including reading comprehension and free reading), vocabulary and grammar worksheets, writing homework, penmanship and open tasks (e.g., free writing or diary writing) with the greatest regularity, while 74% regularly assigned English homework tasks that had a right or wrong answer.

The above responses indicate that the teachers in the study follow similar practices, with a focus on homework tasks that require reading and/or writing. Copying and speaking activities were slightly less common, though both of these were assigned by the majority of respondents.

The majority of teachers denied regularly assigning listening tasks, past exam papers and TSA papers.

The reasons for teachers assigning or not assigning certain kinds of homework tasks were explored in the interviews. Interviewees mentioned that they assigned reading and writing homework due to factors such as the need for evidence that homework has been completed and the use of the textbook, which focused on reading and writing exercises.

Table 10

Type of Homework Assigned by Teachers

I regularly assign …	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		N (%)		
… English homework that requires students to write (*N* = 278)	0 (0)	10 (4)	173 (62)	95 (34)
… English homework tasks that have a right or wrong answer (*N* = 276)	7 (3)	64 (23)	165 (60)	40 (14)
… English homework that requires my students to talk in English (*N* = 279)	9 (3)	104 (37)	146 (52)	20 (7)
	0	31	200	48

… English homework that helps students memorise vocabulary (N = 279)	(0)	(11)	(72)	(17)
… past exam papers and TSA papers for English homework (N = 277)	30 (10)	142 (51)	96 (35)	9 (4)
… . reading comprehension activities for English homework (N = 277)	0 (0)	4 (2)	197 (71)	76 (27)
… free reading (extensive reading) for English homework (N = 279)	2 (<1)	57 (20)	175 (63)	45 (16)
… penmanship for English homework (N = 278)	11 (4)	39 (14)	195 (70)	33 (12)
… listening tasks for English homework (N = 274)	26 (9)	165 (60)	75 (27)	8 (3)
… copying tasks for English homework (N = 278)	23 (8)	96 (35)	148 (53)	11 (4)
… open tasks (e.g., free writing or diary writing) as homework (N = 279)	6 (2)	53 (19)	168 (60)	52 (19)
… vocabulary and grammar worksheets as homework (N = 279)	0 (0)	7 (3)	164 (58)	108 (39)

… activities from the textbook or workbook for homework (N = 279)	5 (2)	17 (6)	174 (62)	83 (30)

Participants were given the option to provide details regarding any additional homework they assigned to their students. One hundred participants wrote additional comments regarding the type of homework they assigned. Some of these types were similar to those in the statements provided, including 'open tasks' ($N = 9$) and 'copying tasks' ($N = 6$). Additional types of homework were coded and categorised into three themes: e-learning ($N = 34$), projects ($N = 6$) and pre-learning tasks ($N = 19$).

Thirty-four per cent of those participants who commented reported assigning various types of e-learning activities, such as reading e-books ($N = 9$), watching videos (e.g., YouTube clips) ($N = 6$) and online games ($N = 23$), as homework. Due to the rapid development of technology and e-learning tools and their use both within and outside of the primary English language classroom, it is not surprising that teachers are now utilising these tools for assigning homework (Mendicino, Razzaq, & Heffernan, 2009). However, this issue did not emerge during piloting or the literature review.

Although projects are promoted as a meaningful type of homework by the EDB (CDC, 2004), only a small number of respondents mentioned including projects in their homework practices. Pre-learning tasks, including searching for information and looking up unknown words, were mentioned by 19% of respondents who provided additional reasons. This is a little surprising, as –

although it is a common pedagogical practice in English language education –
the EDB's (2015) revised guidelines specifically advised schools against this kind
of homework activity.

The 25 homework samples provided by the interviewees were categorised into
various types. As some of the samples included more than one activity, 29
different types of homework exercises were identified (see Table 11). While a
variety of types of homework were provided, grammar exercises (34%) and
vocabulary exercises (20%) were the most common. This supports the survey
findings and accords with the findings of earlier studies in Hong Kong
(Moorhouse, 2018a) and in other contexts (North & Pillay, 2002). The findings
regarding teachers' beliefs in the efficacy of these homework activities are
discussed in response to RQ2.

Table 11

Different Types of Homework Exercises

Type of Exercise (N = 29)	N	(%)
Vocabulary	6	(20)
Copying exercise / penmanship	3	(10)
Grammar exercise	10	(34)
Phonics exercise	2	(7)
Writing task	4	(14)
Speaking preparation	2	(7)
Note-taking	1	(3)
Reading aloud	1	(3)

5.2.4 Sources of Homework Activities Assigned by Teachers

The results of the questionnaire show that nearly all of the respondents (92%) regularly assigned homework activities from the textbook and workbook. This supports Chien & Young (2007a) finding that textbooks dominate English language education in Hong Kong.

The use of the textbook as a source of homework activities was confirmed by the interview data. Interviewees mentioned that their homework activities either came from or were designed around the school's English textbook (all but one teacher used a textbook). Joan discussed how the teachers at her school decided the content and type of homework they assigned to their learners, with reference to her current unit:

> *Well it's all according to the units we work with in the textbook … we look at the Magic Textbook and sort of see what the grammar items are, what are the vocabulary items and we work backwards.* (Joan)

Winnie mentioned that about half of her homework activities came from the textbook while the other half were designed by the teacher, which she felt were more creative:

> *I think half of the homework [is] from the textbooks, from supplementary exercises, but that is mechanic drilling, yes, we have more creative homework like writing, other learning tasks, that is designed by teachers.* (Winnie)

This split between the textbook and teacher-made materials is evident from the analysis of the sample homework materials. Table 12 shows the frequency and

percentage of different sources. It can be seen that commercial textbook materials or materials created by teachers constitute 56% of the samples provided. This supports the findings from the survey and interviews that textbooks are a key source of homework materials and that teachers are regularly assigning homework from the textbook.

Table 12

Source of Homework Materials

Source (*N* = 25)	*N* (%)	(%)
Commercial textbook / workbook / exercise book	3	(12)
Textbook supplementary materials (created by teachers)	11	(44)
Education Bureau materials	1	(4)
Other materials (created by teachers)	10	(40)

5.2.5 Deciding Homework Activities

When asked how they decided what homework to give, interviewees provided two different responses. Homework activities were either decided collaboratively in meetings with teachers from the same grade level or provided to them hierarchically from senior teachers such as English panel chairs or vice-principals. The following interview extract show how homework is decided collaboratively:

We have collaborative planning for the lesson every chapter. So all the teachers of the same level will sit together and we will talk about homework and we will talk about which ones we will give to the students first. And we will design some tasks for the students. (Mary)

This practice of collaboratively selecting and designing homework activities was mentioned by four of the interviewees, while others mentioned that the homework activities were provided to them by senior teachers. The following extracts show the hierarchical nature of decision-making in relation to homework activities:

> *I think it's the, one, what is that, the curriculum development officer or the English panel, we already have a set of homework we need students to complete, and the teacher, he or she can decide how to deliver the homework to the students each day.* (Ann)

These extracts show that homework activities are decided either collaboratively among teachers teaching the same year or by teachers in senior roles. This leads to a level of standardisation of practices in schools that differs from the findings of studies in other international contexts, where individual teachers are primarily responsible for the homework they assign (Medwell & Wray, 2018; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Brock et al., 2007; Sparks & Malkus, 2015). Participants described how they assigned the same or similar homework as other teachers in their schools:

> *It's all similar on paper, but I guess it's the way we teach the homework and present the homework [that] is different. But the ink and pen is the same.* (Joan)

It is interesting to note that, while teachers commented that they assigned the same or similar homework as their colleagues, like Joan above, they also frequently mentioned that, although the tasks were the same, teachers took varied approaches to presented homework to students or preparing students for the homework. They also distinguished between required homework, which came from the textbook, and other homework activities designed by teachers.

Homework that derived from the textbook had to be assigned, but some teachers had flexibility regarding additional homework activities. Jessi described this practice in response to a question regarding whether she was able to assign different homework activities from those assigned by other teachers:

> *Teachers can opt out some questions, or worksheets and sometimes we differentiate the worksheets; for some more able students we will ask more challenging questions and for less able classes we just give them more support to finish the homework. Those school-based things but not those publisher's exercise books.*
>
> (Jessi)

This standardisation of homework practices was reinforced by the school's monitoring system. Interviewees mentioned that their homework was checked by senior teachers to confirm whether the work has been completed and whether the teacher had followed the school's feedback practices:

> *[Senior teachers] will also check the correctness so how correct and how careful you mark students' work and they will check whether students finished all the corrections.* (Alice)

This standardisation of practices is discussed in more detail in response to RQ3.

5.2.6 Time Spent by Teachers on Homework Related Activities

Two survey questions focused on the time teachers spent on homework-related activities on a typical day, both in the classroom and out of the classroom. Respondents were asked to provide the number of minutes spent on homework activities per class. In the classroom, teachers spent an average of 13 minutes on tasks such as explaining, giving demonstrations and providing feedback on homework activities, with time spent ranging from 5 to 40 minutes ($N = 229$). This

time is in relation to approximately 30–70 minutes of English lessons per day. Hong Kong primary schools are required to provide eight periods of English language lessons of 30–40 minutes in duration per week (CDC, 2002; Morris & Adamson, 2010). During the interviews, participants mentioned that the time spent in class is dependent on the type of homework, students' familiarity with it, and students' performance on previous homework activities.

In class, interviewees reported spending time explaining homework activities; however, this depended on students' abilities and their familiarity with the homework activities. Six out of the eleven interviewees mentioned that, after reviewing students' homework, they would spend lesson time explaining common errors and sharing good examples of homework in class. Peter explained his practice of checking homework and then discussing the common errors in class:

> *I will check it by myself and I will mark it one by one and if I find some common mistakes then I will show them in the classroom, telling them most of you have done it wrongly, why, try and ask them to figure out the reasons why and try and improve it, so this is my style.*
> (Peter)

Outside of the classroom, respondents reported spending an average of 54 minutes per class (ranging from 5 minutes to 150 minutes) on homework-related activities such as planning, selecting, making and marking homework, with 50% of respondents spending an hour or more with each class. While the range is large, an average of 54 minutes per class per day is significantly more time than primary teachers in the UK spend on homework activities outside of the classroom (Medwell & Wray, 2018). This amount of time could be related to the

amount and type of homework teachers are assigning their learners. Homework that requires written responses, such as grammar and vocabulary exercises, may require more time to mark.

The most common feedback approach used by participants was the comprehensive marking of all mistakes followed by grading. However, this depended on the homework type, with teachers giving grades and answers to worksheets and exercises, while providing feedback and comments on writing tasks, as evidenced by this comment of Peter's, 'For grammar exercises … we just mark them, but for writing, we give feedback.'

5.2.7 Summary of RQ 1 Findings

It is evident that homework is indeed a common practice amongst English language teachers in Hong Kong primary schools. The quantities of homework assigned are consistent with other research on homework in Hong Kong (Tam & Chan, 2016; Ng, 2015; Moorhouse, 2018a). The findings show that teachers expect their students to spend a significant amount of time on English language homework daily and set homework for various reasons, such as to practice what has been taught in lessons and to provide feedback on students' progress. This suggests that teachers see homework as important, which aligns with the findings of earlier studies (Tam & Chan, 2016). However, during the interviews, teachers noted that they assigned this amount of homework not only due to their own beliefs in the value of homework but also due to other influences, such as school policy and parental expectations. This differs from the findings of studies in other countries, which have found teachers to be primarily responsible for the amount and type of homework they assign to meet pedagogical needs of the learners

(Brock et al., 2007; Medwell & Wray, 2018; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Sparks & Malkus, 2015). Textbooks emerged as a source of materials for homework in the survey, interview and samples, indicating their importance. While teachers seem to spend a substantial amount of time on homework-related activities every day, this seems to be partly due to the expectation that all homework activities must be marked, which is monitored by senior teachers. The various schools in the study followed similar practices, suggesting that homework practices are to an extent standardised throughout English language primary education in Hong Kong. These influences are further explored in response to RQ3.

5.3 RQ2: What Beliefs Do English Language Teachers Have Regarding Homework with Young English Language Learners?

This section presents data related to the second research question, 'What beliefs do English language teachers have regarding homework with young English language learners?' As was discussed in the literature review, little is known about teachers' beliefs about homework (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Brock et al., 2007; Warton, 2001; Rudman, 2014), while the relationship between beliefs and practices is important (Borg, 2003). The findings are presented under the final combined themes from stage one and stage two of the study generated during data analysis. Extracts from the survey and interviews are used to illustrate the themes. Additional examples for each theme and sub-theme can be found in Appendix 11.

5.3.1 Assigning Homework is the Duty of a Teacher

The survey results show that the vast majority of participants see homework as a normal part of school life (98%) (see Table 13), while also believing that effective or good teachers assign English homework regularly (80%) (see Table 13). The belief that it is necessary to assign homework in order to be a good teacher may account for the amount of homework that teachers are assigning, while the perception of homework as the norm may mean that teachers consider it to be part of their role as teachers to assign homework (Tam & Chan, 2016; Vatterott, 2009).

Table 13

Beliefs About Homework as Being a Normal Part of School Life

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		N (%)		
Homework is a normal part of school life (*N* = 277)	0	7	207	63
	(0)	(2)	(75)	(23)

Table 14

Belief about effective/good teachers setting English homework regularly

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		N (%)		
Effective/good teachers set English homework regularly (*N* = 276)	2	53	194	27
	(1)	(19)	(70)	(10)

These beliefs were echoed in the interviews, were teachers mentioned that they (or their school) are judged by the homework they set and therefore they cannot challenge their practices. They also felt it was part of a professional teacher's duty. Chloe compared assigning homework to 'taking off shoes' in a temple, you do not question it. She went on to say,

Just like when you go to school you have to do homework and

you are told homework helps you. So the teacher believe it is like

this and the child also believe it is like this. (Chloe)

This may demonstrate an ingrainedness of homework within the education system and culture, as well as why such practices may have been rarely explored. This will further be looked into in response to RQ3.

5.3.2 Homework is Beneficial and Necessary

The survey results show that teachers perceive homework positively as a teaching and learning tool (see Table 15), with 90 per cent of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that homework is necessary for learners to become effective English users. Furthermore, 78 per cent of respondents believe homework to be as important as classwork. Most respondents (96 per cent) believe homework positively influences English learning, and 85% disagreed with the statement, 'English homework negatively affects students' English learning' while 76% disagreed with the statement, 'Homework has a negative effect on students' interest in English'.

Table 15

Beliefs about English language Homework's Benefits

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		N (%)		
	4	24	179	66

Homework is necessary for learners to become effective English users (*N* = 273)	(1)	(9)	(66)	(24)
Homework has a positive influence on English learning (*N* = 278)	1	11	202	64
	(1<)	(4)	(73)	(23)
English homework negatively affects students' English learning (*N* = 278)	18	219	39	2
	(6)	(79)	(14)	(1<)
English homework is as important as classwork (*N* = 278)	4	63	185	26
	(1)	(23)	(67)	(9)
Homework has a negative effect on students' interest in English (*N* = 269)	*16*	*187*	*63*	*3*
	(6)	*(70)*	*(23)*	*(1)*

In addition to this, survey respondents responded positively to the following functions of homework (See Table 16):

- helping students build self-confidence in using English

- helping students perform better on examinations and tests

- helping students develop good study habits

- helping to inform students of their English learning progress

- providing teachers with more information about their learners' abilities.

Respondents' positive beliefs about homework's efficacy as a teaching and learning tool and their strong belief in the variety of functions served by the

practice could account for the prevalence of homework assignment. Similar positive views towards homework have been found in other studies of teachers in other contexts and in relation to other subjects (Brock et al., 2007; Matei & Ciasca, 2015; Tam & Chan, 2016).

The belief that homework is beneficial was evident in the interview responses. All interviewees felt that homework played an important role in students' English learning, seeing it as way for students to consolidate their learning and as giving them a reason to study and keep English learning in their minds. Rachel mentioned that homework is needed every day to ensure that English is kept in students' minds and that they do not forget what was learned in class:

Every day we will give out homework because almost every day we have some new teaching points right? So if they don't have that we just worry they forget or they have to have the … we feel like, I feel like they need to have the routine of practicing and then, because English is not [a] very friendly subject to our students so regular practice is crucial. (Rachel)

Ann mentioned that, without daily homework, students 'won't study' and if 'you give them homework, at least they need to find the answer'.

Table 16

Beliefs about the Functions of English Language Homework

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		N (%)		

Homework helps my students perform better in examinations and tests (*N* = 278)	0	10	173	95
	(0)	(4)	(62)	(34)
Homework helps the teacher know more about their learners' abilities (*N* = 278)	0	10	173	95
	(0)	(4)	(62)	(34)
Homework helps students develop good study habits (*N* = 278)	1	21	199	57
	(1<)	(7)	(72)	(21)
Homework helps students to build self-confidence in using English (*N* = 277)	7	50	184	36
	(3)	(18)	(66)	(13)
Homework helps inform students of their English learning progress (*N* = 278)	1	11	203	63
	(1<)	(4)	(73)	(23)

Interestingly, although the respondents find English homework to be necessary, 54% disagreed with the statement, 'Without homework, students would not use English outside of the classroom' (see Table 17). This suggests that about half of teachers believe their students to have access to English or use English outside of the classroom.

Table 17

Belief About Homework's Role in Students' Use of English Outside of the

Classroom

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		N (%)		
Without homework, students would not use English outside of the classroom (N = 276)	18 (7)	130 (47)	109 (39)	19 (7)

Despite the positive responses to English language homework, there does seem to be limits and a belief that quality homework is more effective than the quantity of homework. In both the questionnaire and the interviews, teachers raised the importance of quality homework, as is shown by this questionnaire response: 'It's not the quantity that counts but the quality'. In the open-ended questions and interviews, teachers described the characteristics of effective homework activities and practices. These characteristics of effective homework are further discussed.

5.3.3 Characteristics of Effective English Language Homework Activities

During coding, characteristics of effective English language homework were identified. It is important to note that these are the characteristics identified by teachers and as will be discussed later, due to various socio-cultural and contextual influences, may not be realised in practice. First characteristics of effective activities will be presented followed by effective practices (these are summarised in Table 18).

Table 18

Characteristics of effective homework activities and practices

• **Effective homework activities**	• **Effective homework practices**
• Provide for free language use	• Are of an appropriate quantity
• Are enjoyable, interesting and relevant	• Provide clear instructions and guidance
• Take a variety of forms	• Provide timely feedback and opportunities for sharing
• Are achievable	

5.3.3.1 Effective Homework Activities Provide for Free Language Use

Teachers' comments on the questionnaire and in interviews suggest that they find open homework activities more effective than rote exercises. Through analysis of teachers' descriptions of their effective homework samples and beliefs, they defined open homework activities as activities that provide learners with opportunities to use language freely, allow for creative language use, encourage personal responses and provide learners with choices regarding content and presentation. This quote from Rachel illustrates this:

> *Constructive . . . homework should be given—as it provides more chances to use English concepts in ways that are authentic and allow students to be in control of the quality of [the] homework submitted . . . instead of gap fill / or cloze passage types of exercises.*

In the interviews, teachers mentioned the importance of providing choices and student ownership of the assigned homework. Winnie said, 'If you let them have ownership in their homework . . . I think they would find it more meaningful'. She

contrasts this with rote activities such as copying. She said, '[copying is] the worst task in the world . . . it wastes both the teachers' and students' time' while Peter stated when talking about copying that, 'to some extent I don't think it's useful. if I ask students to copy ruler 100 times. It's meaningless.' This preference for more open activities was largely due to the teachers' belief that such activities are more fun and interesting and encourage learners to put more effort into their work. However, the negative perceptions towards rote exercises was not shared by every interviewee, other teachers felt that copying had value as a homework activity and that students liked it because of its relative simplicity:

> *You know, we take a questionnaire about homework … the results are that they like copying the most. They like copying. … You know, mind yourself like that, it [is] the easiest homework and [takes a] very short time to finish. So copying is the first thing students like to do.*
> (Angela)

5.3.3.2 Effective Homework Activities are Enjoyable, Interesting and Relevant

Respondents report that homework activities that students enjoy, and find interesting and relevant to their lives, are more effective in helping them learn. The data showed that this was associated with students' motivation to do the activity and overall interest in the subject. Winnie stated, 'We want them to find learning English to be fun, and enjoyable, so we try our best to make English homework as interesting as possible'. She gave an example to illustrate the importance of relevance when assigning homework:

> *We have to set authentic tasks relating to their needs, their lives, their interests. Like if you ask them to write about their favourite movie*

star . . . If you ask them to write about Jackie Chan, I don't think they

would have interest because they have no idea who he is. So there

should be something related to their lives. (Winnie)

Interviewees mentioned that students enjoy homework activities such as word puzzles, word jumbles, crosswords, and riddle writing when discussing their homework samples. The extract below shows Joan's belief about the need to design homework activities which are exciting:

So English, for me, I think it can be fun. I try to present it in a fun way,

where you know so you can see other works like crosswords, using

vocabulary, or it could, this one is [shows example] identify, rather

than actually write, draw circles, wiggle lines, brackets … but to

identify it, so I think it challenges the students to do homework in a

different way as opposed to filling in the blanks, which I could do as

well but would not be as exciting. (Joan)

5.3.3.3 Effective Homework Activities take a Variety of Forms

Most survey respondents (93%) reported that teachers should assign a variety of different homework tasks to their learners (see Table 19). As one questionnaire respondent stated, 'a variety of "formats" of homework are necessary—speaking, writing, listening, and different text types'. This was echoed in the interviews as this extract from Jessi illustrates, 'homework should not only focus on written assignments, but also on reading aloud, doing projects, e-learning and so on'. This seems to be borne out in practice, with teachers setting a variety of homework tasks, although reading, grammar and vocabulary exercises seem to be the most common (See Table 11). A variety of homework tasks may help

teachers achieve their learning outcomes. Different homework activities can better reflect what they are teaching in English lessons.

Table 19

Teachers should set a variety of homework tasks

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
	N (%)			
Teachers should set a variety of homework tasks (*N* = 278)	1 (<1)	6 (2)	146 (53)	125 (45)

In the interview and open-responses to the questionnaire, teachers suggested that homework activities can include watching movies or YouTube clips, playing phonics games, writing songs and poems, writing reports, researching information for a project, making short videos, following a recipe or reading story books.

5.3.3.4 Effective Homework Activities are Achievable

As homework is completed outside of school, students may do it without the support of others. Therefore, teachers feel it is important that the homework activities are achievable, and students can complete them independently. One teacher wrote:

> *Teachers need to take special care when assigning homework. If the homework assignment is too hard, it is perceived to be busy work, or it takes too long to complete, students might*

tune out and resist doing it. Never send home any assignments that

students cannot do.

This point was echoed by Winnie in the interviews. 'I think homework should be something they've seen, they've learnt. It should not be something new to them'. Teachers believe that homework that is achievable gives the students satisfaction and the feeling of success when they can complete it on their own. Ann said, 'homework should make [students] feel that they are successful . . . "oh, I really learn something in the lesson, I can complete the homework by myself."'

At the same time though, there is also a belief that homework should challenge learners with, 84% of respondents agreeing with the statement that, 'It is important to set homework that challenges the learners.' (See Table 20)

Table 20

Belief that it is important to set homework that challenges learners

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
	N (%)			
It is important to set homework that challenges the learners (*N* = 277)	1 (<1)	42 (15)	200 (72)	34 (12)

So, while homework should be achievable it should still pose a challenge and not be seen as 'busywork.' To do this, respondents mentioned the importance of

catering for diversity with teachers suggesting that different homework activities can be assigned with different levels of difficulty.

5.3.4 Characteristics of Effective English Language Homework Practices

5.3.4.1 Teachers should Assign an Appropriate Amount of English Language Homework

The amount of homework to assign was the topic most frequently raised by teachers in both the survey and interviews. They showed great concern for the impact that too much homework could have on students' interest in learning, as illustrated by these comments on the questionnaire: 'Too much homework will ruin students' interest in learning. Deciding the right amount of homework is essential' and:

> *'[An] adequate amount of homework or assignment helps students improve their discipline and knowledge in English. But it is not necessary to have homework every day. Motivation is more important in language learning. If homework quantity demotivates students on their learning, the teacher should consider other approaches rather than bombarding students with homework solely for the results in exam improvement'.*

There was a concern about the effect excessive homework could have on students' lives:

> *I think homework is good for students, but we cannot give too much homework because students should have a balanced life too, they should have some time to relax. (Ann)*

While most respondents shared similar opinions, it was hard for them to pinpoint the amount they felt was appropriate. Peter felt 'less than 30 minutes' would be appropriate while Jessi and Angela felt '15-20 minutes' might be appropriate. The difficulty of stating an appropriate amount could be due to the large variables associated with assigning homework, such as learner differences, the age of learners, the regularity of English classes, student backgrounds and other responsibilities (including homework from other subjects). These findings were also found in the survey results with only 33% of respondents saw a large amount of homework as evidence of a rigorous curriculum. The majority (69%) of respondents disagreed with the statement, 'The more time students spend on homework, the more they will learn', while 86% disagreed with the statement, 'Homework is more important than other non-academic activities' (See Table 21).

These comments suggest that, while teachers believe in the practice of assigning homework, there needs to be careful consideration of the amount of homework that should be assigned. If 'too much' homework is assigned, there is a belief that this can demotivate learners and reduce students' interest in learning (Czerniawski & Kidd, 2013; Kohn, 2006) while possibly 'burden[ing]' and 'overload[ing]' both students and teachers as respondents suggested.

Table 21

Beliefs About the Amount of Homework Teachers Assign

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		N (%)		

The more time students spend on homework, the more they will learn (N = 273)	30	159	79	5
	(11)	(58)	(29)	(2)
Setting a large amount of homework is evidence of a rigorous curriculum (N = 275)	30	155	74	16
	(11)	(56)	(27)	(6)
Homework is more important than other non-academic activities (N = 276)	29	208	37	2
	(11)	(75)	(13)	(1)

5.3.4.2 Teachers should Assign Homework with Clear Instructions and Guidance

To ensure the homework activities assigned are achievable, teachers believe it is important to provide learners with clear instructions on how to complete the homework, as well as with support in the classroom before the homework is assigned. As this teacher wrote, 'sufficient guidance and instructions are crucial'. They feel that if there is insufficient guidance before students need to do it, they will feel insecure. To ensure students are prepared for the homework activities, teachers spend time in class explaining the homework requirements, discussing their expectations and giving time for students to start their homework with the teachers' guidance. Angela said, 'We have to explain clearly what students are going to do and where they can get references . . . before we send homework home'. The amount and kind of support provided are determined by students' familiarity with the type of homework activity and its complexity. Chloe describes how she supports students by doing some of the homework questions with them before they take it home, 'I will teach the target language then we will do a few

questions together then I will give them the rest to do at home'. Teachers have a keen awareness of their role in guiding and supporting students to complete homework.

5.3.4.3 Include Timely Feedback and Opportunities for Sharing

Participants believe that for homework to be effective, they must provide timely feedback. In addition, time should be allocated in class for students and teachers to review and discuss completed homework. Teachers reported using the time to share examples of good work and discuss common mistakes and misunderstandings. Winnie describes the importance of discussing homework in class:

> *Homework should be something that can provide teachers with a chance to give students immediate feedback. If I mark their homework, then in the next lesson, I can focus on their common mistakes, so they can build on their foundations laid in previous lessons*. (Winnie)

Mary describes how they share the work in class and ask peers to evaluate each other's work:

> *We share [completed homework] in class on the visualiser and we ask students to give comments and share the work. And then for some [homework] activities, we will try to find the mistakes and we do peer evaluation during the class.*(Mary)

These practices of providing feedback and discussing work in class allows students to be more aware of their learning progress and move their

learning forward. If students do not receive feedback on homework, it cannot be fully utilised as a teaching and learning tool and may be perceived by students to be unimportant (Vatterott 2009).

5.3.5 Beliefs about Current Practices

Despite participants stating their beliefs of what constitutes effective homework, not all teachers felt they could implement their beliefs in practice. This can be seen by some mis-matches between the findings of RQ1 and RQ2. It is therefore important to present findings related to the teachers' beliefs about their current practices. While the interviewees in this study all believe homework to have an important role in teaching and learning, not all of them felt that their practices matched their beliefs. A majority of them had negative beliefs about their current practices. These negatives beliefs were around the level of autonomy they received, that they were required to assign too much homework, that the activities focused on drilling and writing at the expense of other kinds of homework activities, that time should be allocated in school for homework and that students do not like the current practices.

5.3.5.1 No or Limited Autonomy for Teachers Regarding Over Homework Practices

Some interviewees felt they had limited opportunities to assign homework that matched their characteristics of effective homework as they were required to assign prescribed homework activities which may or may not match their beliefs. As has been presented in response to RQ1, the way homework is decided, either hierarchically or collaboratively, means that teachers reported receiving limited

or no individual autonomy over their homework practices. The following excerpt illustrate the lack of autonomy some teachers feel:

> *No autonomy! For activities yes, but for homework no.*
> *Even if it is something that I want to give to my class separately,*
> *that, I could perceive as something useful. I have to do it secretly*
> *and tell the class, don't tell anybody else that I've give you this.*
> *Because they want everything to be standardized.* (Joan)

A similar point was reflected in Rachel's comment. When asked if her practices matched her beliefs, she said that her current homework practices 'matches the expectation … It doesn't match my personal belief, but it matches the needs and expectation and the reality of the current situation'.

These two extracts show that teachers see their practices as conflicting with their beliefs and that they cannot implement the kinds of homework practices they may believe in. Rachel's comment that her practices match 'expectations' rather than the reality shows that there were influences on practices that prevented her from following her beliefs. Joan had to subvert the system in order to assign homework she thought would be useful. She commented in another part of the interview that the homework she assigned was neither effective nor beneficial as a learning tool as learners did not know how to apply what they had learned. Both Joan and Rachel described the process of deciding homework as collaborative, yet they still had issues with their practices. Alice seemed to see her practices as the most different from her beliefs; she described her school as very hierarchical and remarked that her practices were delegated by the school's vice-principal. The excerpt below describes the homework practices at Alice's school:

[The senior teachers] push us, we push [the students], we need to,

so you see all these corrections, we need to make them done within,

before a certain time, and then sometimes deadline was just told by

one or two days before. And it was in two days' time I literally told the

students to finish all the corrections during recess [or] lunchtime after

school make sure they are finished, so I can give it to panel head so

that she can go through it. And then every time the teachers being

pushed, the students are being pushed… (Alice)

A respondent to the questionnaire, felt that teacher autonomy was important to ensure the homework assigned met students' needs:

I think teachers should have their free choice to decide which and

how much homework to their class according to the ability of the

class due to the 'rules' or 'practice', teacher and students suffer too.

But in the end, I think homework is really useful for teachers to keep

track of Ss' learning progress.

The lack of autonomy experienced by teachers seems to be the reason for the other negative beliefs about the current practices with finds presented below.

5.3.5.2 Quantity of Homework

As has been mentioned above, the findings suggest that teachers are concerned about the amount of English language homework students receive. Some participants suggested that students do not have to receive homework every day and that the amount they currently receive should be cut so student have more time for other activities as this teacher wrote, 'Homework should be cut or [time should be given] for students to finish them during school time so that they can

[do] whatever they want after school.' Ann gave an example of how the quantity of copying could be reduced,

> For example penmanship, they need to copy each word six times and they, there are 16 words, … so I think it's too much for some students. So I think maybe they can just copy each three times,

The quantity was seen as a creating a burden on both students and teachers, particularly the quantity of prescribed homework as mentioned above and illustrated by this quote, '[There is] not much room for teachers set homework freely due to tight curriculum. Meaningful homework is important but there are a lot of 'set homework' to be completed.'

5.3.5.3 Type of Homework

Some respondents felt that the type of homework they currently assigned was not ideal and that they would prefer to give different kinds of homework to their learners. They reported a dominance of mechanical drilling activities and writing. Mary stated,

> *…I think if we need to change because we still have a lot of work like handwriting or penmanship which students spend a lot of time on it.* (Mary)

These were felt to be less effective in developing certain skills, particularly critical thinking, while not being enjoyable to learners. Others suggested that students should receive more reading as homework rather than writing. Alan suggested that on Fridays, students could be asked to read books freely rather than do writing.

5.3.5.4 Time Allocated to Completion of Homework at School

An interesting suggestion by teachers was the idea that time could be allocated in school for the competition of homework, as this quote from Rachel shows,

> *I want them to do the homework in class, yes, because when they go back home, they have many after-lessons already. Then they forget and then they have to pick it up again. And I think if the consolidation comes right after the learning, it's much more effective. Yes that's the biggest thing I … like I, I see the importance of homework but I think the timing is so wrong.* (Rachel)

This belief was borne out of the idea that teachers would be available to help them. This idea is supported by the EDB which encouraged schools to provide time in school for students to complete homework with the help of teachers (EDB, 2015). As has been discussed above, some teachers currently have these practices, while others do not.

5.3.5.5 Students Do Not Like Current Practices

Despite the beliefs of teachers presented above that homework should be enjoyable, there was a belief that student did not always enjoy the homework they assigned. When asked whether students enjoyed doing homework, the majority of teachers indicated that they did not, as evidenced by Alice's comment:

> *They don't really like homework, … 'cause it's a lot of work for them, a lot of sentences, a lot questions, a lot of writing. They are all about writing, a lot of writing and re-writing.* (Alice)

The findings suggest that teachers see assigning effectively engaging homework activities as important. If students do not enjoy the homework

activities, most interviewees feel it is less effective, as this quote from Chloe illustrates:

> *I believe homework helps no matter they like it or not. If they like*
>
> *them, it is more effective, if they don't like it they will do it very*
>
> *slowly or copy from other but they still learn something.* (Chloe)

5.3.6 Summary of RQ2 Findings

It can be seen from the findings to RQ2 that teachers see homework as beneficial and necessary in the young learners' English language classroom with teachers believing homework is as important as classwork. Teachers were able to identify certain characteristics of effective homework practices and activities. These characteristics were common among the participants, although there were some discrepancies, such as the value of copying. A key finding though is that, despite teachers being able to articulate characteristics of effective homework, a majority of those interviewed felt their current practices did not match their beliefs. This seems to be borne out of the amount of autonomy teachers have over their practices with teachers often required to assign specific homework activities and follow standardised homework practices. The influences on such practices are explored in response to RQ3.

5.4 RQ3: What Factors Affect English Language Teachers' Practices and Beliefs?

The interviews and data analysis revealed that the influences on teachers' beliefs and the influence on their practices were not always the same. Therefore, the findings related to RQ3 are divided into two parts: influences on teachers' homework practices and activities and influences on teachers' beliefs about homework. It is important to note that, while these perceived influences were identified, the degree to which they impacted on practices and beliefs could not be established, and further research is needed in this regard. Furthermore, influences were self-reported by participants or inferred during the data analysis, and they must be understood in this context. Additional data extracts for each theme and sub-theme can be found in Appendix 12.

5.4.1 Influences on Teachers' Homework Practices – School Policies, Norms and Expectations

All interview participants discussed the role school policies, norms and expectations played in influencing their homework practices and activities. Four related sub-themes emerged, Standardised homework practices and activities, textbook and assessment dominated curriculum, heavy workload/ tight curriculum and school policy on quantity of homework activities. These will be presented one by one.

5.4.1.1 Standardised Homework Practices and Activities

 Data shows a dominance of standardised practices with regard to homework. This means English language teachers teaching the same grade assign the same

amount and type of homework to their classes at around the same time (Moorhouse, 2018b). This extract from a survey respondent illustrates this kind of practice:

> *Each school has its own English curriculum with homework policy.*
> *To some extent, teachers have to follow the 'system. In [Hong Kong],*
> *it's [a] regular [practice] to give homework like 'grammar', 'workbook'*
> *'worksheets' etc. Teachers [do not] have much flexibility in designing*
> *the tasks.*

The homework activities teachers are required to assign are controlled, overseen and monitored by senior teachers, such as the vice-principal or English panel chair as part of the schools' teacher appraisal and quality control processes. In the following extract, Angela discusses how homework is dictated by senior teachers and how the teachers need to follow the homework prescribed to them:

> *The English panel has target homework for students to do to*
> *consolidate their learning. And then [senior teachers] divide the*
> *homework [between colleagues]… we have so [much] homework for*
> *one unit [so teachers] have to carefully design which day you have*
> *to [assign] more and what kind of homework you ask students to do.*
> (Angela)

This standardised homework seems to prevent or even restricted some teachers from giving additional homework either because there is too much homework they were required to assign or because the school policy or norms prevent them from assigning additional homework. As Joan's and Alice's previous quote regarding autonomy shows (see XXX), teachers in their schools are not allowed to give additional homework on top of the homework they are required to assign.

While others mentioned that they did not give additional homework so as to not overburden students, as this quote illustrates:

> *My homework practices are actually strongly restricted by the requirements given by the school. As there are already sets of homework that students need to compete, if I set other varieties of homework, they would become extra workload for both students and teachers.*

This puts pressure on teachers to ensure the homework is done so they can hand it in and can use the homework to revise for the school-based assessments. The finding that standardised practices affect teachers' practices is an important one, as it has been assumed that the amount of homework assigned is related to the belief in its value as a teaching and learning tool (Brock et al., 2007; Tam & Chan, 2016). However, it is clear that, although the teachers in the study did value homework, they were also required to assign it. Indeed, some teachers' responses showed a negative opinion of the such homework practices as illustrated by this quote, 'School's set homework requirements which may involve activities which are not useful i.e. rote memorization' and has been found in response to RQ2.

5.4.1.2 Textbook and Assessment Dominated Curriculum

As mentioned in response to RQ1, the source of teachers' homework activities for most interviewees is the commercial textbook. Textbooks seemed to guide teachers both in their teaching and in their choice of homework activities. Chloe describes the influence of the textbook on her practices:

> *[We select homework activities] from textbook content and then when the exam is closer we will think [about] what we plan to assess most likely they are grammar points, we will gather some grammar drilling exercise and let them be the support before exams, generally [the exam] was designed according to the textbook, like workbook, like grammar [book] and the curriculum [is] textbook based.* (Chloe)

This finding is not surprising, as the dominance of textbooks in Hong Kong schools is well known and reported in the literature (Carless and Wong, 2000; Chien & Young, 2007a; Morris & Adamson, 2010; Tong et al., 2000).

A related influence was school examinations and assessments. Participants reported that students had regular examinations – either once or twice a semester – in addition to weekly or fortnightly dictation tests. Such frequent testing has been found to be common in the Hong Kong education system (Carless, 2005; Carless & Lam, 2014). Homework is assigned to help prepare students for these examinations and assessments. Some participants described their classroom teaching, the homework and the assessments as correlated.

Chloe noted that 'The assessment will be [designed] around the homework, which is closely aligned to the curriculum, which is a cycle', while Jessi contrasted homework in Hong Kong and its purpose—to prepare students for assessment— with the practices prevailing in other countries:

> *I think homework is unavoidable… because the way we assess and teach is quite different from other countr[ies] and basically our students are test[ed] on what they learned in school so that it's*

essential for them to have homework in Hong Kong education system.

(Jessi)

This seems to suggest that assessment and homework are ingrained and that the emphasis on assessment makes assigning homework inevitable with the textbook forming the foundation of the English language curriculum and homework practices.

5.4.1.3 Heavy Workload / Tight Curriculum

The data suggests that a heavy workload and a tight curriculum impact on teachers' homework practices. Limited contact time with students means teachers feel they do not have enough time to finish the curriculum content. As this teacher states, 'We don't have enough time to finish all the stuff at school. That's why [students] need to do some at home.' While, Rachel commented that 'The number of lessons and input they get does not match the expectations. Like we expect a lot from students but we['re] not giving them enough', while Jessi noted,

> *… because we have to chase the curriculum, because of school holidays or rehearsal, we are chasing the time because we set the assessment a little bit early before we finish everything, so for that particular period before the assessment we will rush everything, and maybe in that period we will give extra homework to catch up with everything.* (Jessi)

In addition to insufficient class time, teachers also felt they had limited time outside of the classroom to dedicate to homework related tasks. This, participants felt, impacts on the type of homework they assign to those that are easier to mark.

The extract below illustrates this. When Joan wished to adapt her homework practices to better match her beliefs, her principal was concerned about the marking load this change would generate:

> *… when I first approached my principal about changing [the homework practices] and adding a section which was more open ended for example model verbs use the word can to express ability in a sentence kind of thing. My principal [said this] might be a little bit hard because she didn't want the teachers to mark extra work….* (Joan)

As was found in response to RQ1, English language teachers in Hong Kong seem to be spending a large amount of time on homework related tasks. The pressure placed on teachers to cover the curriculum content, often to prepare learners for assessments, means they need learners to engage with English learning through assigned homework outside of class time. While, the limited time teachers have, and the large amount of time already dedicated to homework can be seen as a barrier to assigning additional homework activities or homework that more closely align with their beliefs.

5.4.1.4 School Policy on Quantity of Homework Activities

All teachers interviewed mentioned that the school had a policy on the number of pieces of homework they must assign every day, before long holidays or in each teaching unit. The average amount required was two pieces of English language homework per day. The extract below from Chloe describes the homework policy at her school:

We have, like, a norm[al] policy that we have [to assign] at least two pieces of homework, like main subjects, English, Chinese, Maths and General Studies. (Chloe)

Jessi described an interesting policy at her school that was designed to ensure students did not take too much homework home each day. Teachers who taught classes in the afternoon were required to first review the homework that had been assigned during earlier classes. If that homework was already considered to be substantial, the guideline recommended assigning less homework that day.

[Teachers must assign] at least one piece of homework every day. As they have a lot of homework and lessons every day – they have 10 lessons a day – usually our school policy is, if before lunch a lot of teachers have assigned students homework, then we have to adjust the quantity and quality of homework. (Jessi)

While Mary stated that her students were required to complete one piece of English each day of a long holiday.

A policy in our school [is that] for holiday or for weekend[s] we have to give more homework to students…. for core subjects, English, Chinese, Maths, we have [to assign] at least one piece of homework per day, each day, and if have a holiday or during weekend we need to need at least two, it depends on the duration of the holiday. [If] we have a five-day holiday, we need to [assign] five pieces of homework. (Mary)

Clearly, such policies influence the amount of homework teachers assign their learners. While teachers may believe in the benefits of homework, a requirement

to assign daily homework may limit the type of homework they can assign to something that can be completed in a short period, while likely functioning as consolidation of the daily English language lesson content.

It can be seen that the sub-themes related to school policies, expectations and norms are interrelated. The commercial textbook serves as the 'core' of the English language curriculum and as a tool to standardise the homework practices and activities of teachers. Its content and associated supplementary materials lead to a dense curriculum that teachers feel pressure to complete in order to prepare students for the regular assessments and tests. These are based on the textbook and homework content.

5.4.2 Influences on Teachers' Homework Practices - Parents' Expectations and Opinions about Homework

In addition to school policies, norms and expectations, another factor that teachers frequently mentioned as having an influence on their practices is parents. The next section presents the findings related to the expectations of parents and how schools acknowledge and address parents' expectations and opinions.

The interviewees felt that parental expectations influenced their practices. The teachers believed that parents expected their children to receive homework daily and would judge them and their school by the amount of homework they assigned. Ann noted that 'You cannot … ask the school to give students less homework because some parents might think, maybe do less homework, the students cannot learn well', while Rachel commented,

> *Parents think it's a must to do homework … I think they believe if the teacher don't give homework, the teacher is lazy. … I think they [believe] the teacher is better if they actually mark their homework in detail.* (Rachel)

This quote illustrates the high value teachers feel parents place on homework and the perception that parental expectation is a factor in schools' and teachers' decisions to assign homework. Participants see this value as related to the belief in Hong Kong society that homework positively correlates with academic success and higher exam scores. Within Hong Kong's highly competitive education system, and in light of the value placed in that system on English competency, it is understandable that parents would want students to be assigned English language homework. Mary mentioned the effect that parents' views had on her homework practices:

> *It is so difficult because we are now so exam oriented and the parents are mainly concerned about the exam results. Like this one (Mary showed an example homework activity), maybe for my view I think the design is quite interesting and quite efficient but for parents maybe the kind is quite difficult for them to do revision and maybe [the format used here] is different from the exam paper so they may not feel happy if we just do tasks … without giving them some exam-oriented questions or paper to do.* (Mary)

This extract demonstrates that, although Mary may wish to change certain practices, she fears negative reactions from parents who are concerned about their children's performance in the examinations. Teachers felt that schools listened to parents and would often find ways to address their concerns regarding homework.

5.4.2.1 Schools Acknowledge and Address Parents' Expectations and Opinions about Homework

Teachers mentioned that parents were able to influence schools' homework policies and therefore their practices. Some teachers mentioned that parents' views were collected via questionnaires or by means of unsolicited calls to senior teachers. Five of the interviewees stated that their schools often responded to these requests and found ways to modify their policies accordingly. However, it also emerged that the desires of parents at the same school often conflicted, with some wanting to reduce the amount of homework while others sought an increase or were content with current practices:

> *Every year we send questionnaires to collect parents' opinions if they think 'oh I think too much, too much reading comprehension' and then in the next school year, we will cut. If parents also agree, 'oh writing is good, then we will keep doing it next year'.* (Winnie)

The willingness of schools to respond to parents' views could be attributed to the importance of maintaining a positive public image in a system where schools often need to compete for primary one students and parents are selecting schools on the basis of their academic results (Cheung, 2014; Morris & Adamson, 2010). With the topic of homework being discussed more frequently in the media, parents were believed to be more informed and aware of schools' practices and whether these are positive or negative to students' well-being. This led parents in Alice's school to complain to members of the Hong Kong legislative council,

> *Parents complained a lot, [they] even sent some photos to legislative counsellors. They try to show the scores that they oppose the homework policy here. I can see that the parents are really don't*

know the purpose [of the amount of homework], but they like to send

their children here because of a better kind of higher-level curriculum.

And school response them by reducing the amount of homework little

by little. (Alice)

With schools and teachers valuing parents' comments yet receiving conflicting messages, it may be difficult for them to explore different homework practices for fear of upsetting specific groups of parents.

5.4.3 Influences on Teachers' Homework Practices - Societal Expectations and Culture

Although parents were seen as a key influence on practice, they themselves are positioned within the socio-cultural context of Hong Kong. As has been discussed in chapter two, Hong Kong and China place a high-value on homework and hardwork. Therefore, societal expectations and culture are seen to both influence parents' views and teachers' views towards homework. A teacher wrote, 'It seems to be the culture and non-written requirement in Hong Kong to set homework every day.' The quantity and role of homework in Hong Kong and other Asian societies has been well documented in literature (Adamson & Morris, 1998; Tam, 2009; Tam & Chan, 2012). This was also evident in this study, with the expectation and role of homework coming from an excepted belief that it is beneficial and helps children learn as this quote illustrates:

…unfortunately, in Hong Kong student have a lot of homework

compared to some other Western country. I'm not talking about

Japan or Korea because we have quite similar culture. so that why I

think it's unavoidable and everything is deeply rooted in our tradition

and our mind set. (Jessi)

This belief in the value of homework in the society, teachers felt impacted on parents' choice of schools and the reputation of schools in society. Four participants mentioned that it was common for schools to be compared by the amount of homework the teachers assigned and that parents selected schools on the basis of their homework policies:

> *Do you know some parents choose a school because the reputation that this school gives [a lot of] homework… So homework is a part of studying. Everyone knows it in Hong Kong and in our culture.* (Chloe)

Chloe's last point here demonstrates the deep-rooted belief in the value of homework and that it is seen as part of the culture in Hong Kong.

5.4.4 Influences on Teachers' Homework Practices - Students' English Abilities, Needs and Interests

The final factor identified in the data analysis as influencing teachers' practices were students' English abilities, needs and interests. Participants on the whole believed that their students did not like doing homework, seeing it as a burden or chore. Alice talked about her learners being 'forced' to do homework, while Ann suggested it was normal for students to not like homework as it took away from the time, they had available to 'relax'. When asked about students' preferences regarding types of homework, participants held one of two opinions: students preferred either homework that was interesting or homework that was easy. Mary described students' reactions to the homework she assigned:

> *If the task [is] interesting and full of creativity, then a lot of them would love to do it and then they try to do their very best. But then for some routines like handwriting, penmanship and cursive writing I don't think they will like it.* (Mary)

Teachers with the autonomy to give extra homework in addition to the standardised homework would respond to students' interests and abilities and assign homework that took into consideration their personal needs. Winnie remarked, 'If I find my students are particular[ly] good in certain areas, 'oh they are very good using e-learning tools, maybe I will design more homework … using the e-tools', while Chloe noted, 'For some homework, which is not asked by the school for those pieces of homework, if I think they like it I will ask them to do more, if not I will cancel that homework'. Rachel emphasised the importance of addressing students' individual needs:

> *Students play a very important role [in] helping me decide what to give. … When I give out homework I am thinking of the best student and the worst students in class. I am really thinking of the ability like how can they handle then I am thinking of the balance. Is this homework helping which group of students? And I tend to give homework that benefits most of them …* (Rachel)

Although more research is needed, school policy and parental expectations appear to have the most substantial impact on practices. Students, on the other hand, seem to have minimal influence, with only some teachers adapting their practices to accommodate students' interests and needs. Moreover, such adaptions appear to be limited to the discretionary homework teachers assign in addition to the standardised homework prescribed by school policy or senior teachers. This is somewhat surprising, as best practice dictates that homework be assigned to benefit the student rather than satisfy school policy and external influences (Vatterott, 2009). The practice may contradict the CDC guidelines,

which emphasise learner-friendly homework (CDC, 2002; 2004; 2014; EDB, 2015).

5.4.5 Influences on Teachers' Beliefs - Teachers' Own Educational Experiences

I acknowledge that it can be difficult for us to pinpoint the origins of our beliefs. Indeed, our beliefs about teaching and learning start to develop early in life and continue to be shaped by our own learning experiences, professional development, teaching experiences, and even our family and friends (Pejares, 1992; Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Knowles, 1992). Therefore, the findings presented here are the factors self-reported by the teachers or inferred during data analysis in this study as affecting the origins and development of their beliefs.

All participants stated that they had received English language homework when they were primary school students. While some found it difficult to recall what they had received or experienced, others had clear memories of their English language teachers' practices. On the whole, they found homework effective, however, they did not like doing homework. The practices of their previous teachers, teachers feel, influenced their current beliefs about homework.

5.4.5.1 Found own English language Homework Effective

When interviewees were asked about the effectiveness of the English language homework they had received as a child as a learning tool, they believe it did help them learn English. Jessi believed this was partly due to the limited access to English, which she felt is not an issue now, as this quote illustrates:

> *In that period of time, [English language homework was useful]*
>
> *because there wasn't any other way to learn English or some other*
>
> *language. But today you've got internet and you can learn*
>
> *everything before you come to school. But at that time teachers were*
>
> *the only source for me to learn English.* (Jessi)

They was also a belief that the homework effectiveness was evident by them

doing well in school-based assessments and exams, as this extract

demonstrates:

> *When I was child, everything was very traditional, I don't have task*
>
> *worksheets also the thing homework I had was penmanship,*
>
> *handwriting and grammar exercise … but I think the more practice I*
>
> *have it gave me more confidence so during the exam I got higher*
>
> *marks so that's why I was willing to do exercise[s].* (Mary)

This belief in homework's effectiveness to their own English learning is likely to

influence their current belief about the benefit and necessity of homework today.

Teachers, who perceive positive benefits to their own learning by a specific

practice, will likely emulate this in their own teaching (Borg, 2006).

5.4.5.2 Did Not Enjoy Doing Homework

Interesting though, although they found homework to be effective, interviewees

reported that they did not like nor enjoy doing homework as children. Peter

stated that he had not liked homework when she was in primary school:

> *I don't like it, but I know I have to do it. [And], my students, I don't*
>
> *think all of them like to do homework, but they know they have to*
>
> *do it.* (Peter)

This belief in homework's benefits but at the same time the recollection that it was not enjoyable, may account for the teachers' tolerances towards their current practices in which they also feel their students do not enjoy English homework. Even though they may believe enjoyable homework is more effective, fundamentally there is a belief that homework is beneficial even if it is not enjoyable.

5.4.5.3 Influenced by Own Teachers' Practices

When asked to consider the influences of their previous English language teachers' practices on their current practices and beliefs about homework it was interesting that participants either felt their experienced somehow explain their current practices or they suggested how their current practices are now different due to these experiences. Ann perceived the act of having received homework as a child as justification for her own current practices. She felt that it was not her place to challenge practices either then or now: 'When I [was] at school, teachers gave me homework, so that's why when I am a teacher, I give homework to students'. Jessi shared a similar belief, commenting, 'Like when I was young, I was given homework like this way, [so] when I grew up, literally I just follow what my teachers did in the past.'

When teachers had had negative experiences of homework as children, such as too much copying or homework they felt they could not complete because of insufficient support, they consciously addressed this in their current practices. Rachel and Chloe both felt that their English teachers did not give them much support in their homework, which led them to believe in the importance of providing more support to learners in the classroom:

I think the unsupported part was much more than what I give to my

students, because I found it very difficult if I think I asked to do but I

am very unfamiliar with them, so I hated it. So, most of the homework

I [assign now I provide] support to my students. (Chloe)

The interviewees' responses to the questions regarding their own experiences show that these had affected their own beliefs and, to an extent and when possible, their practices, such as the kind of support they provided. It seemed that, although they had not themselves enjoyed homework, they still saw it as beneficial. As they had seen it as a chore, they could understand why their learners did the same, and while some teachers longed to change their practices, for instance by reducing copying, providing more support and designing more interesting homework, there still seemed to be an underlying belief in homework as essential. This belief may have been ingrained by their childhood experiences and belief in the benefit homework had bought them. This could be an example of the phenomenon known as 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie, 1975), wherein teachers' beliefs and practices are highly influenced by their own learning experiences (Borg, 2004), from which these teachers' positive conceptions about homework's effectiveness originated.

5.4.6 Influences on Teachers' Beliefs - Teachers' Professional Development

During the interviews, teachers were asked to comment on the effect they believed their own professional development, including their initial teacher education as well as their experiences as teachers, had had on their beliefs regarding homework. Five of the eleven interviewees commented that they had

received no specific training or professional development on homework practices. Two others stated that they had received training on designing homework during their initial teacher education, while four commented that they had been exposed to different educational contexts and countries, where they had observed homework practices that differed from their own experiences as children and from their current practices.

5.4.6.1 No Training on Homework Practices

The experiences of the five teachers who had received no training corroborate earlier findings that training and professional development in relation to effective homework practices are often limited or neglected (North & Pillay, 2002; Moorhouse, 2017, 2018a, 2018b). This increases the likelihood that these teachers' beliefs will be informed by the practices of their own childhood teachers (Borg, 2004) or their reference group, the other teachers at their respective schools. Jessi described learning about homework from colleagues:

> *Being a teacher, then you learn from other teachers. Basically, no one told me how you assign homework; just think and assume this is the best way, … when I was a fresh teacher I gave quite a lot of homework but some other teachers would come to me, 'oh, I think this a little bit too much'; I learnt from the others*. (Jessi)

5.4.6.2 Received Training on Homework Practices

The participants who had received training felt that it has affected their beliefs, and while not all of them could realise these beliefs in their practices, this awareness gave them the ability to critique those practices and find ways to compensate for their limited autonomy through their actions in the classroom,

such as creating a positive environment and ensuring quality homework. In this

extract, Alice described the impact her pre-service training had had on her:

> *When we studied in university, we studied a lot of English language*
>
> *teaching when we got out to see more [practices from] western*
>
> *countries, how they regard homework. I think they have an impact on*
>
> *me. That's why I think it's important to think outside of the box. Really!*
>
> *And then to see different practices outside so I can really rely on that*
>
> *to my practice.* (Alice)

This exposure to different ways of thinking about homework – ways that Alice

called Western – had a similar impact on Alan, who related an anecdote to

highlight the contrast between what he called Western and Chinese thinking:

> *I ask my kids why [did you] get a lot of homework [today], [and they*
>
> *said,] 'Because today is Friday'. But if you [go] are out of Hong Kong*
>
> *like New Zealand, [and ask the question] 'Why no homework*
>
> *[today?]. [They would say.] 'Because today is Friday'. [It is] totally*
>
> *different and I say Chinese society like doing a lot of homework in*
>
> *written form, but they don't believe that also reading is a kind of*
>
> *homework.* (Alan)

5.5 Summary of RQ3 Findings

The findings in relation to RQ3 illustrate the complex relationship between

practices and beliefs, and the influences on those practices and beliefs, within

the sociocultural context in which homework is assigned. Teachers' homework

practices appear to be most markedly influenced by school policies and

standardised homework practices and activities (Benson, 2010; Moorhouse,

2018b), which lead teachers to assign similar homework to that assigned by their colleagues. These practices are influenced by parents, to whom schools seem to be most responsive when it comes to homework, suggesting their role as key stakeholders in the construction of the sociocultural context. It is encouraging to see that schools seek parents' feedback on their homework practices; however, it may also be important for schools to justify their practices to parents and develop homework practices in response to research and students' needs (Vatterott, 2009) rather than parental expectations. Teachers do respond to students' needs, but this seems to be limited to the support they provide in the classroom for homework activities and any additional homework they assign (if their school policy allows them to do so). Teachers' beliefs seem to be influenced by their own learning experiences and professional development. All teachers had received English homework as children. This created a reference point for their own beliefs, and as interviewees perceived homework as having benefited them, they will clearly detect a similar benefit to their own learners. While only some teachers had received training, those who had seemed to believe this training had influenced their beliefs and given them another way to view the practice of homework. Despite these beliefs, the contextual and sociocultural factors that influence teachers' practices mean that teachers often have limited control over their own practices (Johnson, 1994; Richards & Pennington, 1998).

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

This study set out to explore and further our understanding of the pedagogical practice of homework within English language education from the perspective of teachers through a two-stage empirical study using multiple data collection methods, including a survey, interviews and homework samples.

Homework, being such a common topic of interest in society and the media, is nevertheless neglected by researchers. This failure has left us with an incomplete picture of teachers' practices and has left teacher educators, policymakers, school administrators and teachers to rely on anecdotal evidence when supporting English language teachers, developing homework guidelines and policies or assigning homework to learners. This study provides greater insight into Hong Kong primary English language teachers' homework practices, beliefs about the purposes and efficacy of homework and the sociocultural and contextual influences that affect teachers' practices and beliefs (Chang et al., 2014; North & Pillay, 2002; Moorhouse, 2017, 2018b; Painter, 2004).

The findings support the conclusions of previous studies carried out in Hong Kong that homework is a pedagogical practice universally employed by teachers (e.g. Tam & Chan, 2016), while giving us a more nuanced understanding of the practices of teachers, with a focus on English language education. English language teachers assign homework for various purposes, while considering it to be a useful, even essential, teaching and learning tool.

Although the findings must be considered with reference to the context in which the data were collected (Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Rudman, 2014), they help us conceptualise the pedagogical practice of homework as experienced by English language teachers, as shown in Figure 5. The figure provides us with a way to theorise the relationship between teachers' practices and beliefs and the factors affecting these practices and beliefs. To demonstrate how this study has advanced our understanding of teachers' homework practices, this section will provide a description and analysis of the key findings as captured in Figure 5, while drawing on the relevant literature. Each part of the figure is discussed in

turn, followed by an examination of the relationship and connections between teachers' homework practices, their beliefs, and the sociocultural and contextual influences on those practices and beliefs. The figure provides a framework that can be used to guide future research on the pedagogical practice of homework in English language education, particularly in educational systems like that of Hong Kong, which have been found to combine standardised practices with hierarchical and centralised decision-making structures (Morris & Adamson, 2010; Benson, 2010; Moorhouse, 2018b; Wan et al., 2018).
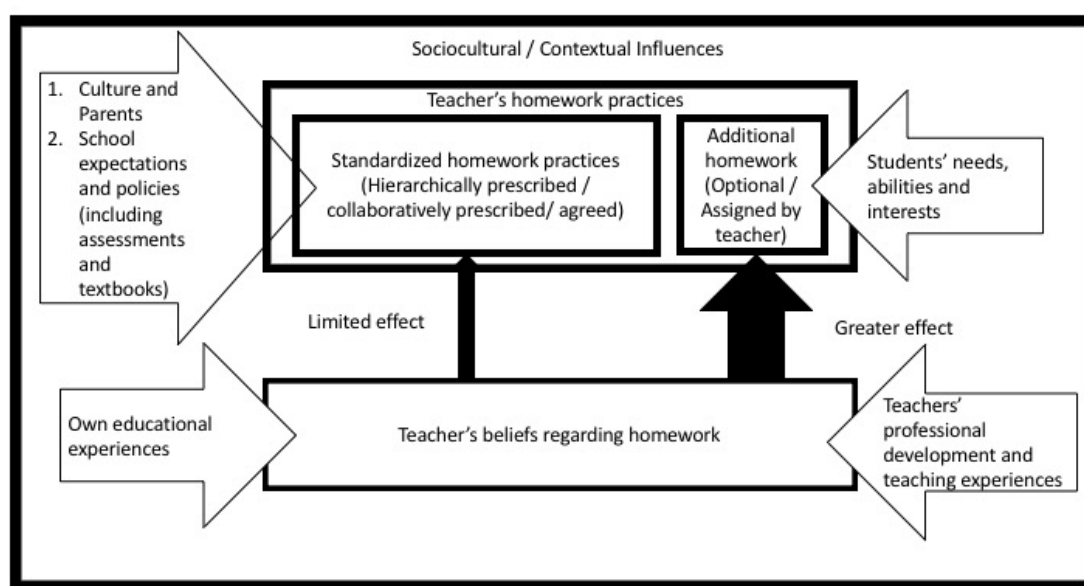

Figure 5. Summary of Key Findings

6.1 Teachers' Homework Practices and Influences on Their Practices

The findings in relation to RQ1 provide us with a deeper understanding of English language teachers' homework practices, including the quantity of homework assigned to learners, the intended purposes of homework, the types of homework assigned, the sources of homework activities, how homework practices are decided, and the time spent by teachers on homework-related activities, within the context of Hong Kong.

Most teachers in this study were found to assign two pieces of homework daily while expecting students to spend 11–40 minutes on homework every night. This is similar to the findings of Moorhouse (2018a) and consistent with studies by Tam and Chan (2010, 2011) on parental and student involvement in homework in Hong Kong. However, this is more than North and Pillay (2002) found

secondary English language teachers to assign their students in Malaysia and significantly more than Medwell and Wray (2018) and Brock et al. (2007) found primary teachers in the UK and USA, respectively, to assign. As has been speculated, primary school teachers in Hong Kong appear to assign more homework than their international counterparts. The quantity of homework teachers assigned is also reflected in the time teachers spend on preparing, monitoring and marking homework, with an average of 54 minutes per class per day, making this a significant part of teachers' role and demonstrating the importance accorded to homework. The interview findings suggest that a substantial proportion of this time is spent comprehensively marking students' homework to meet school expectations and requirements.

The findings suggest that the interviewees perceive the homework they assign as serving a number of purposes. All items related to purpose on the Likert scale received positive responses; however, analysis of the open-ended questions and interview data suggests that the main purposes for which homework was assigned were to provide students with opportunities to practice and consolidate what they had learned in class and to gain insight into teachers' teaching and students' learning. To achieve these purposes, the surveyed teachers reported providing a variety of homework tasks to their learners, with reading activities (including reading comprehension and free reading), vocabulary and grammar worksheets, writing homework, penmanship and open tasks (e.g., free writing or diary writing) being the most regularly assigned homework types. These tasks were primarily obtained from textbooks and workbooks. Teachers have long been known to rely on textbooks in the classroom (Cheung, 2014; Morris & Adamson, 2010; Chien & Young, 2007a, 2007b), however, this study confirms their role within teachers' homework practices. Earlier studies found that, across contexts, there appears to be a focus on reading, workbooks, worksheets and exercises (Brock et al., 2007; North & Pillay, 2002; Medwell & Wray, 2018). It has even been found that additional homework activities developed by teachers were mainly used to supplement the textbook and provide students with additional practice. The preference for homework that requires writing may stem from the focus on these activities in school curricula (Carless, 2005) or the ease of marking and designing such activities (Moorhouse, 2018a). This preference for written homework activities - indeed only two of the 29 homework samples provided

related to speaking and none related to 'listening' (See Table 13) - may mean that oral skills of speaking and listening are neglected in teachers' homework practices. This may have the consequence of students not receiving sufficient practice in these skills and they may perceive them to be less important. Indeed, Hong Kong primary English language curriculum has been found to place greater emphasis on reading and writing and this, some argue, has led to students' being more confident and able in reading and writing than speaking and listening (Cheung, 2014). With the development of mobile technologies and on-line learning platforms, perhaps there are opportunities for the integration of speaking and listening activities into teachers' homework practices.

Interestingly, the teachers' practices of assigning daily, skills-based exercises for homework which are then monitored and marked seem to align with the vision of effective homework proposed by Hattie (2009). In reality, however, the current study would suggest that such practices may not be as effective as Hattie implies. Teachers can struggle to assign such regular homework and review it before they then have to teach and assign homework again. While such practices seem to contradict their beliefs of effective homework practices and activities (see Table 18), it is important to note that Hattie (2009) also advocates for less or almost no homework in elementary schools and, clearly, in Hong Kong, as the study and other studies have shown (Tam & Chan, 2016; Moorhouse, 2018a), this is not the case. He argues that young learners may not be ready for the demands of doing homework on their own. In addition, Hattie (2009) reminds us that homework can have a negative effect on some learners by reinforcing 'that they cannot learn by themselves, and that they cannot do the schoolwork' (p.235). This can 'undermine motivation, internalise incorrect routines and strategies, and reinforce less effective study habits, especially for elementary students' (p.235). The perception of teachers (found in this study) that students do not enjoy homework may lead to these negative consequences towards the subject of English and the attitude towards learning.

Another finding is that homework is seen as an integral part of the 'teaching, learning and assessment cycle' (Cheung, 2014):
1.   Teachers teach something and assign homework to consolidate what was taught.

2.   They then comprehensively mark the homework to check students' learning.

3.   Teachers sometimes re-teach, or students correct their mistakes.

4.   This culminates in a test, examination or assessment that assesses students on the content taught and the homework assigned.

The link between homework and assessment seems to be stronger in Hong Kong than in other educational contexts. This is supported by previous studies that have found primary education in Hong Kong to be dominated by assessment (Brown et al., 2009; Carless, 2005; Carless & Lam, 2014; Cheung, 2014). It may also account for the pressure teachers feel parents put on schools to provide homework, as parents may wish to ensure that their children are properly prepared for assessments (Tam & Chan, 2010).

This integration of homework into the teaching, learning and assessment cycle has been formalised within the school curriculum through homework policies. The amount, type and purpose of the homework assigned seems to be largely dependent on these policies. To ensure compliance with these policies, schools implement monitoring procedures, such as 'book checking', where teachers must provide samples of their students' marked homework for senior teachers to check on a regular basis (Benson, 2010). These are positioned within school decision-making structures that valued homogeneity and the standardisation of teaching practices (Benson, 2010; Moorhouse, 2018b; Wan et al., 2018).

This formalisation of homework practices within the school curriculum through specific policies has not been found in other studies of teachers' homework practices and is therefore worthy of further discussion (e.g. Brock et al., 2007; Chang et al., 2014; Medwell & Wray, 2018; Moorhouse, 2018a; Tam & Chan, 2016). Studies in the US and UK have often found individual teachers to have the freedom to develop different homework practices in response to their pedagogical needs (Brock et al., 2007; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Medwell & Wray, 2018). Bryan and Burstein's (2004) finding that different teachers may give different homework within the same grade appears not to apply to Hong Kong primary school English language teachers. Equally, Epstein & Van Voorhis's (2001) assertion that teachers are primarily responsible for their own homework practices and routines does not seem to hold true for English language teachers

in Hong Kong primary schools. These findings also challenge the suggestion by Tam and Chan (2016) that teachers in Hong Kong are assigning homework on the basis of their beliefs in its value as a teaching and learning tool. While this may be partly true – and teachers in the current study indeed reported seeing the value of homework – it can be seen that teachers' practices are also greatly influenced by sociocultural and contextual factors.

As Figure 5 shows, the findings suggest that teachers' homework practices can be divided into standardised homework practices, 'where English language teachers teaching the same grade assign the same homework to their classes at around the same time' (Moorhouse, 2018b, p. 4), and additional homework, where teachers are free to provide supplementary and other homework activities in addition to prescribed tasks. These are discretionary and assigned by individual teachers to their respective classes.

The findings suggest that teachers are mainly assigning standardised homework. These are either prescribed within centralised and hierarchical decision-making structures (Wan et al., 2018) by senior teachers who dictate homework policies and practices or collaborative prescribed or agreed upon between teachers within a grade level in accordance with certain school policies, such as those governing the quantity of homework to be assigned daily and during long holidays, the source of the homework materials, such as textbooks or workbooks, and feedback approaches.

The standardisation of practice is understandable in an education system that values hard work and fairness and where assessment is seen to motivate learning and guide teachers' teaching (Brown et al., 2009; Cheung, 2014; Pong & Chow, 2002). In such a system, homework serves as a measure of teachers' commitment and students' work ethic and provides proof of the rigorous nature of the school curriculum (Tam & Chan, 2010).

Participants mentioned that parents actively consider the amount of homework teachers assign when selecting schools for their children. Mary even stated that her school was 'famous' for the amount of homework assigned. As homework is the public face of a school, and schools wish to portray a certain image or

reputation, the drive to ensure that homework practices are standardised is unsurprising (Moorhouse, 2018b). However, this standardisation can restrict teachers' autonomy and prevents them from being able to provide homework that meets their learners' individual needs. Benson (2010) found that teachers were able to circumnavigate the pressure to standardise their classroom teaching through the use of subversive tactics, such as speeding up the prescribed curriculum to create time to do other things; however, this seems less likely and less feasible in the context of homework, which is visible to multiple stakeholders. Any deviation from prescribed norms could therefore lead to complaints by parents who feel that their children have been denied materials that could potentially appear in school examinations (Moorhouse, 2018b).

Not all teachers were permitted to assign additional homework; Joan had to contravene school policy and give additional homework 'secretly', while other participants reported that that they were forbidden from providing additional homework by school policies or felt that students already received enough standardised homework.

I suggest that these two homework practices, standardised and additional, are influenced by different factors, while teachers' beliefs about homework can be more closely realised in the additional homework they choose to assign than in the standardised homework they are required to assign. These two categories of homework can be seen as connected yet distinct. They are connected in that teachers are obliged to assign the standardised homework before they can provide additional homework, but they are distinct in that the teachers' beliefs regarding homework have a significant effect on the additional homework but a limited effect on the standardised homework (as shown in Figure 5). It is acknowledged that this distinction warrants further exploration. However, it allows us to theorise the relationship between beliefs and practices and how beliefs can influence certain aspects of practice, while other contextual or sociocultural factors can influence other parts of practice (Borg, 2003; Johnson, 1994; Richards & Pennington, 1998).

As Figure 5 shows, the findings suggest that standardised homework practices are influenced by school policy (as previously discussed), parents and culture.

Parental expectations were cited as reasons for assigning homework in both the questionnaire and interview, and these expectations appear to offer a key rationale for the drive by schools to standardise practices. Indeed, when justifying their school's standardised homework policies, participants mentioned parents' desire for all students to be treated fairly by receiving the same homework (Benson, 2010; Moorhouse, 2018b). Interview participants also mentioned that parents expected homework and would complain if their child did not receive homework. To better understand parents' views, some schools elicit feedback from parents on their homework practices through questionnaires. This practice may give parents a voice and help them feel connected to the school (Vatterott, 2009). While it is important to consider parents' opinions regarding homework, it is also important to consider the pedagogical benefits of homework practices on learners as well as of teachers' autonomy to make decisions regarding their own classroom and homework practices.

It is, of course, important to consider parents' and society's needs; however, the standardisation of homework seems to have consequences, notably on teachers' autonomy. If teachers are unable to control the amount or type of homework they assign their students, they may not be able to assign homework that accords with their own beliefs or meets the needs of their learners.

Furthermore, a number of teachers in the survey and interviews reported that homework is a cultural norm and a deeply rooted part of Hong Kong society. This makes any attempt to alter teachers' practices challenging. The robust discussion in the media and society about the role of homework may have limited practical impact in schools if homework is seen as a cultural practice (Tam & Chan, 2010; Zhang, et al., 2010). Indeed, in a society such as Hong Kong, which values hard work and diligence in its students and where hard work is seen as indispensable to success, it will likely be difficult to challenge the practice of homework (Cheung, 2014; Ho, 1986; Pong & Chow, 2002; Urmston, 2003). Although two of the interviewees suggested that homework ought to be completed at school, this practice may not match the societal expectation placed on students and teachers. Teachers may feel unable to suggest such practices for fear of being labelled 'lazy'. Schools for their part may be reluctant to reform 'tried and true' practices, even if there is limited empirical evidence supporting these practices (Brock et

al., 2007). Finally, if all schools require some kind of homework, as this study suggests, it will be exceptionally difficult for any a school to challenge an otherwise universal practice.

Some teachers reported having more autonomy, including the ability to assign, adapt and modify additional homework in response to their pedagogical needs as well as students' interests, abilities and needs. Interviewees reported that they would respond to students' needs by providing homework to help with areas of difficulty as well as assigning homework that students enjoyed while reducing tasks that students found tedious. However, it is important to note that teachers mentioned that they did not always assign additional homework due to the large pre-existing workload created by the standardised homework. This consideration therefore limited the impact they could have on their practices and their ability to cater for students' needs through their homework practices.

6.2 Teachers' Beliefs Regarding Homework

The findings regarding RQ2 show that the teachers in this study had an overwhelmingly positive view towards homework as an effective teaching and learning tool. Teachers used words such as 'necessary', a 'must for students', 'essential' and 'good for students' when describing homework: 96% believed homework to positively affect students' English learning. These findings support the conclusions of previous studies that have found teachers globally to have positive perceptions of homework (Brock et al., 2007; Matei & Ciasca, 2015; Tam & Chan, 2016) and the literature that has argued that the belief in homework is 'akin to faith' (Kralovec & Buell, 2000, p. 9) and 'cultlike' (Vatterott, 2009, p. 9). One novel finding of this study is the belief that homework is of equivalent importance to classwork. This suggests, as mentioned above, that homework is seen as central to students' learning and is at the heart of teachers' practices.

Interviews mentioned the various purposes for which homework was assigned, such as giving students a reason to use English and to study. This belief in homework's effectiveness seems to have its origins in and be influenced by teachers' own experiences of homework as primary school students and the positive effects they feel homework had on their English language learning. This

is an important finding, as the literature on the benefits of homework for primary learners is inconclusive (Rudman, 2014; Vatterott, 2009).

Both the survey respondents and interviewees did provide caveats when discussing the benefits of homework while providing characteristics of effective homework (See Table 18 for a summary). These preferred practices are important as they provide us with a understanding of the thoughts that guide teachers' practices or 'ideal' practices. One important and most frequently raised criteria was assigning an appropriate amount of homework. Teachers appeared cognisant of the possible negative effects on learners of excessive homework. Participants suggested that, while homework could be seen as extending the lesson time, overburdening students with homework would result in demotivation and loss of interest. This warning regarding the appropriate quantity of homework is worth heeding in Hong Kong's schools, which are known for the large amount of homework they assign (Tam & Chan, 2010, 2011, 2016). Despite recognising the potential adverse effects of excessive homework, teachers struggled to verbalise how much homework would be appropriate. Determining the optimal quantity of homework was seen as complex, as each student completes homework at a different pace, while some teachers and schools allow students to complete homework during school hours. Interestingly, one school had implemented a policy in an attempt to avert the risk of too much homework being assigned. Teachers were required to determine how much homework had already been assigned by other subject teachers before giving additional work. It also seems common for teachers to assign more homework, such as writing, at weekends and during long holidays. While this practice may appear to mitigate the risks of excessive homework, it may not adequately consider students' other commitments and could detract from their time with family and friends (Kohn, 2006). It would certainly be worth exploring these policies from the perspectives of parents and students to establish whether they feel such practices to benefit them.

Although participants had an overwhelmingly positive opinion of homework as a pedagogical practice, this did not automatically translate into a positive view of their own practices. Instead, some interviewees felt that their current practices were rigid, ineffective and tedious to students, and did not lead to learning. This

finding conflicts with those of previous studies, revealing that, while teachers may have positive perceptions of homework as a practice, their current practices do not reflect their beliefs. Instead, other factors, as mentioned above and detailed in Figure 5, are influencing their practices and hindering their ability to adopt practices and activities that align with their beliefs (as summarised in table 12) (Basturkmen, 2012; Farrell & Bennis, 2013; Phipps & Borg, 2007). This has important ramifications, as teachers who cannot implement practices that match their beliefs may have reduced motivation and job satisfaction (Parker, 2015). This could impair student attainment (Machin & Vernoit, 2011) and reduce both learners' and teachers' autonomy (Benson, 2000; 2007). These are all seen as central to teachers' sense of professionalism and their professional practice (Parker, 2015).

A few participants reported not having received any professional training regarding homework. This is unsurprising, as previous studies have reported that homework is often neglected in teacher education programmes, which instead focus exclusively on classroom practices (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; North & Pillay, 2002; Moorhouse, 2017, 2018a). However, those teachers who had received training or opportunities to observe different homework practices believed these to have had a positive impact on their beliefs. Alice, who had had the opportunity to observe teachers in New Zealand, believed this to have had a significant impact on her practices by giving her a different perspective on homework from that which she had acquired through her own experiences as a student. Given the prevalence of homework as a practice, it seems sensible for teachers to receive more guidance and development on effective homework practices (Moorhouse, 2017; 2018b). In the absence of professional development, teachers are compelled to turn to colleagues for suggestions and advice, which may entrench traditional practices (Borg, 2003; Lortie, 1975).

6.3 The Complex Relationships Between Practices, Beliefs and Influences

This study has helped conceptualise the relationships between teachers' practices and beliefs and the factors that shape these. Some of the assumptions employed in previous studies can now be challenged, with the link between beliefs and practices emerging as more complex and positioned within the

specific sociocultural context. Although the theorisation of the findings as presented in Figure 5 must be tested, the data seem to suggest that standardised homework practices are greatly influenced by parental expectations, cultural norms, and school expectations and policies, with teachers' beliefs having a limited effect on, or even deviating from, these homework practices. Teachers' beliefs were more likely to be realised in practice in the context of additional, discretionary homework provided to their learners.

This study highlights a number of contextual factors that affect teachers' practices identified in earlier studies in Hong Kong (Lee, 2009; Wan et al., 2018) but not previously linked to teachers' homework practices.

Firstly, the use of hierarchical and centralised decision-making structures in Hong Kong schools (Morris & Adamson, 2010; Wan et al., 2018), with formalised monitoring practices such as 'book checking', prevents teachers from subverting sanctioned practices (Benson, 2010). This finding highlights the perceived role of teachers within that system and their perceived responsibilities in relation to students' learning. Although more research is necessary, the data point towards a view of teachers as technicians responsible for implementing the policies and practices of others rather than professional educators with the autonomy to develop pedagogical practices that meet the needs of their learners.

Secondly, this study highlights the importance placed on parents' expectations in the competitive Hong Kong system, which sees schools competing for students and being measured by their success as determined by the number of students entering elite secondary schools (Adamson & Morris, 1998; Tam & Chan, 2010). With homework being the public face of the school, schools seem to see the provision of homework as essential to ensuring that parents' expectations are met.

Thirdly, the role of assessments and textbooks within the primary education system can now be seen as impacting not just on the classroom practices of teachers but also on their homework practices. Assessments and textbooks evidently have a direct influence on the standardised of homework practices.

Textbooks are the principal source of homework materials, while homework serves to prepare students for assessments.

It can be challenging to pinpoint the specific factors and influences that account for certain practices or beliefs (Lantolf, 2000; Farrell & Kun, 2007). However, by conceptualising the findings as presented in Figure 5, we can gain deeper insight into the possible relationships between them.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

This study provides us with an improved and more holistic understanding of homework as experienced by English language teachers in Hong Kong. The study concludes with an overview of its contribution to existing knowledge, its practical implications and the recommendations that follow therefrom, its limitations, and a call for further research.

7.1 Contribution to Knowledge

As has been shown in the literature review, there are few studies that have explored the homework practices of subject-specific teachers and as a practice, homework is under-researched. Therefore, my findings contribute empirical data and thus knowledge to our understanding of the complex pedagogical practices of assigning homework. These findings are useful for practitioners and scholars in the field in Hong Kong and other related countries, such as Singapore, Taiwan and Mainland China.

As has been documented in the literature (e.g., Moorhouse, 2018a), the current study also found that homework is a universal practice amongst primary school English teachers in Hong Kong. However, it has provided us with more significant details and improved understanding of these practices, than was previously known. It provides empirical data showing the type of homework assigned, how teachers decide their practices, the time teachers spend on homework-related activities and the source of such activities. It shows us that teachers' are mainly assigning homework which is dominated by activities that require a written response which are skills-based. This leads to speaking and listening skills being neglected. These homework activities are closely monitored by the teacher, who promptly marks them comprehensibly and assigns a grade. Previous studies (e.g., Chien & Young, 2007a; 2007b) have found that textbooks play a dominant

role in Hong Kong primary school classrooms. The current study shows that the use of textbooks goes beyond the classroom to serve as the primary source of homework activities.

 While other studies have found primary school teachers in Hong Kong to have a positive belief about the functions of homework (e.g., Tam & Chan, 2016), this study was able to go beyond what was currently known. I identified characteristics of homework practices and activities that English language teachers deem effective in achieving their desired functions of homework, such as assigning an appropriate quantity of homework and designing homework activities that are enjoyable, interesting and relevant (see Table 18 for a summary of these characteristics). This is an important finding; we now know that teachers believe homework to be more effective if it meets specific criteria. These preferred practices and activities are perceived by teachers to be effective in achieving their desired purposes based on their experiences and knowledge. Further studies are required to explore whether these practices and activities are actually effective in helping learners improve their English.

Another contribution from the study is the finding that despite teachers being able to articulate characteristics of effective homework, they believe they face contextual constraints preventing them from implementing homework that aligns with their characteristics. This is primarily due to the standardisation of practices within a school, with teachers who teach the same grade being required to give the same homework as their colleagues. The majority of homework is prescribed to teachers either hierarchically or collaboratively. It has been shown that this standardisation of practices is due to sociocultural and contextual influences,

such as school policies and parents' expectations. The findings suggest that these contextual factors may have a greater impact on teachers' homework practices than on classroom practices. Concerning these homework practices, some teachers accept the standardisation of practices, seeing it as their duty to assign homework prescribed to them. However, others find it constraining, preventing them from developing homework practices and activities to meet the specific needs of their learners.

In addition to the contributions to knowledge, the study also adds to our theoretical understanding through the development of a conceptual framework (Figure 5). The figure helps us conceptualise the complex relationship between practices, beliefs, and influences on those practices and beliefs. This illustration can be used to examine such relationships in other contexts and subject areas.

The contributions provided in this section have practical implication for the field.

7.2 Practical Implications and Recommendations

This study has shown homework to be a universal practice among English language teachers in Hong Kong. Despite a lack of empirical evidence supporting the use of homework as a tool to develop primary school students' academic performance or English learning (Cooper, 2001; Farrow et al., 1999; Czerniawski & Kidd, 2013; Moorhouse, 2017, 2018a), English language teachers appear to maintain a belief in its value. Both this faith in homework and the prevalence of the practice seem to be influenced by the Hong Kong sociocultural context.

Teachers' practices appear to be dominated by standardised homework practices, which are prescribed by senior teachers or mutually agreed upon between teachers and must be assigned to students. These practices limit teachers' ability to provide English language homework that they feel their students would enjoy or need (Moorhouse, 2018b). This is evidenced by the

contrast between the overwhelmingly positive perception of homework and teachers' views of their current practices as sub-optimal. This section presents practical implications and recommendations for teacher educators, policymakers, school leaders and English language teachers.

7.2.1 Teacher Educators

Pre-service and in-service teachers come to teacher education and professional development with preconceived notions of teaching and learning arising from their own experiences and reference groups (Goodwin, 2010; Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Lortie, 1975). Teacher educators need to help them explore their own beliefs and understandings and provide space for the exploration of alternative approaches. As evidenced by the literature review and supported by the findings, teachers frequently do not receive much training or guidance on effective English language homework (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; North & Pillay, 2002). The lack of confidence and knowledge required to challenge standardised practices may lead teachers to follow the practices of their own previous teachers and colleagues (Moorhouse, 2017, 2018a; Phipps & Borg, 2007; Tam and Chan, 2016). Now armed with a better understanding of the sociocultural context that has led to prevailing homework practices, teacher educators in Hong Kong are encouraged to provide teachers with training on effective homework strategies while supplying them with access to different experiences and room to reflect on their practices and explore other methods (Goodwin, 2010). The data would suggest that strategies on how speaking and listening skills practice can be integrated into teachers' homework practices should be included in such courses, as these skills are important to the learning of English, but seem to be under-represented in teachers' current practices.

Teacher education institutes should look at ways of including homework practices and out-of-class learning into their courses and programmes (Moorhouse, 2017).

7.2.2 Policymakers and School Leaders

The findings evidence the central role school leaders and administrators play in developing homework policies and monitoring teachers' practices. This finding is consistent with those of other studies into teacher agency and autonomy in Hong

Kong, which have found Hong Kong to have a hierarchical decision-making structure that erects barriers to teacher autonomy and prevents educators from making decisions based on pedagogical needs (Benson, 2010; Chein & Young, 2007b; Wan et al., 2018). While a level of standardisation may be expected by parents, and the use of textbooks can limit the types of homework teachers assign (Chein & Young, 2007b), I suggest that school leaders and policymakers evaluate their schools' homework practices and policies to find ways to provide teachers with greater autonomy. Providing teachers with independence is seen by many as essential (Parker, 2015). Teachers need to be able to make decisions about their students' out-of-class learning as well as their in-class learning. Attention should also be given to other potential ways students can continue their English learning outside of the classroom. Participants reported that their students did indeed have other avenues to use English outside of the classroom. These ways are worth exploring and may potentially be more beneficial than prescribed homework. School leaders must find ways to balance the expectations of parents with the need to provide teachers with some flexibility in their practices.

7.2.3 English Language Teachers

This study focused on homework from the perspective of teachers. In contrast to previous studies (Brock et al., 2007; Medwell & Wray, 2018) and in conflict with the views of some scholars (Czerniawski & Kidd, 2013), it found that teachers are not the main decision-makers in their students' homework practices. Instead, there is a complex relationship between teachers' beliefs, practices and sociocultural influences. This is an important finding that has implications for teachers. English language teachers are encouraged to evaluate their own practices and consider how to best meet the learning needs of their students through their homework practices. While they may feel constrained by the standardised practices in their schools, the manner in which they provide feedback to students, assign homework and integrate homework into their classroom teaching could provide ways to better use the time they and their learners dedicate to homework (Vatterott, 2009). Teachers are also encouraged to conduct short-term studies on their homework practices and collect data from learners and parents on their perceptions of the matter. This could help them gain a better understanding of their students' practices, which could in turn help inform

teachers' practices. Teachers may also wish to explore ways of providing homework that develops students' speaking and listening skills. Digital technologies and on-line learning platforms could aid teachers in developing such practices.

7.3 Limitations

As with any study, it is important to treat the findings with caution and consider how they might be applicable or generalisable to other educational contexts or other subject teachers. This study is contextually bound. Thus, although some of its findings may be generalisable to other contexts, the study's intent – to explore teachers in the Hong Kong primary context – limits their generalisability. In the interest of honesty and transparency, further limitations are presented below.

7.3.1 Study Design Limitations

The first limitations relate to the questionnaire design. Although the questionnaire was piloted three times, the final survey retained some shortcomings. The use of a Likert scale complicated the comparison of some items, such as the purposes for which teachers assigned homework, all of which received positive responses. The scale was chosen due to its familiarity to the target population (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009), but its use made it impossible to draw certain results from the data. A ranking scale such as that adopted in Moorhouse (2018a) might be more appropriate way to collect data about certain practices. Furthermore, during piloting, the relatively small pilot sample meant that certain practices and purposes were not identified. While space was provided for additional comments, not all participants provided additional information, making it difficult to gauge how prevalent certain practices might be.

The second limitation relates to the sampling method used for the survey. I had originally intended to use stratified random sampling to increase the generalisability of the findings (Cohen et al., 2011) but soon realised that it would be difficult to access and deliver the questionnaire to the target population. Instead, convenience and snowball sampling were adopted. While this provided a high response rate and a large sample, it may limit the generalisability of the data.

The third limitation relates to the sampling method used for the interviews. In order to recruit interviewees, space was provided on the survey consent form to allow participants to self-nominate. This potentially limited the participants to those who were interested in the study and felt that they had something to share. While 35 participants expressed interest in participating in the interviews, only 11 finally agreed to participate, three of whom worked at the same school. Although interviews with as few as four participants have been shown to provide enough data to explore a phenomenon (Stake, 1995), it is still necessary to be cautious when interpreting data from a small sample. Fortunately, the sample included a range of teachers from different districts of Hong Kong, levels of experience, school types and ranks (see Table 8).

The fourth limitation concerns the homework samples. While these provided a way to triangulate the data with the questionnaire and interview findings, participants self-selected the homework they shared, with the result that the samples may not be representative of all the types of homework assigned by teachers. My original intent was to ask participants to keep a log of the homework they assigned. However, a number of teachers indicated that this would likely be too labour-intensive and would discourage them from participating.

In any study, there are trade-offs between the ideal methods and practical considerations, and we need to be honest about the decisions we make and ensure our data is presented in an accurate light.

7.3.2 Study Scope Limitations

In addition to the limitations stemming from the design of the study, the findings are also limited by the study's scope. Although these choices were deliberate and aimed at making the study more focused and manageable, they nonetheless limit the breadth and depth of the findings. The study would clearly be strengthened by the inclusion of other voices involved within the practice of homework. As has been found in previous studies (Vatterott, 2009; Tam & Chan, 2010), parents seem to play a fundamental role in the practice, and indeed, the teachers involved in this study believed parents to be influential. Nevertheless, the kinds of parental

involvement, particularly in relation to English language homework, teachers' expectations of parents and the actions that parents in fact take were not explored. Another decision that impacted on the scope was to disregard the similarities or differences in the practices teachers may adopt with students of different ages. Medwell and Wray (2018) found that teachers of different grades assigned different types of homework for different purposes. As Hong Kong English language teachers tend to teach across levels, it was decided that it would be difficult to gather data on teachers' practices for different grades. In addition, in hindsight, greater exploration of the specific subject of the English language would have created more beneficial insights and contributions to knowledge than the study was able to do. With the above limitations in mind, others are encouraged to continue to explore teachers' homework practices and the practices and beliefs of other stakeholders regarding homework.

7.4 Call for Further Research

This study ends with a call for further research on the pedagogical practice of homework. The literature review has highlighted our limited understanding of this almost universal practice of teachers. Without more research using different methods, in different contexts and with different stakeholders, we will not have a clear picture of this common practice of teachers across the globe (OECD, 2014). This study, as with most others, appears to have raised more questions than answers, and therefore more research is needed to continue to further our understanding of this complex, socioculturally dependent practice.

This study has highlighted the role played by various stakeholders in homework practices in Hong Kong. Thus, researchers are encouraged to gather data on the practices and beliefs of different stakeholders around English language homework at the primary school level. As homework practices seem to form part of a standardised hierarchical decision-making structure, research on the beliefs of school leaders and policymakers would provide us with an understanding of their rationales for these approaches.

As teachers' practices and beliefs have not been studied beyond a few contexts, I also encourage researchers to explore teachers' practices and beliefs in

different countries and at different levels of education. Figure 2 provides a starting point for researchers interested in exploring homework from the perspective of teachers by providing a conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between teachers' practices and beliefs and the factors that determine these.

As stated in the introduction, homework research is a complex undertaking (Hallam, 2006). It is therefore necessary to continually explore the practice from multiple perspectives, so we can continue to advance our understanding and hopefully provide a better educational environment for our students and teachers.

7.5 Conclusion

This study has helped develop our understanding of English language homework as experienced by primary school English language teachers in Hong Kong. Specifically, teachers' homework practices, beliefs regarding the utility of the practice as a teaching and learning tool, and sociocultural and contextual influences on these practices and beliefs were explored.

Situated within the interpretivist paradigm and within a sociocultural theoretical framework, a two-stage research design was employed which generated qualitative and quantitative data. The first stage involved a survey of 279 primary school English language teachers working in aided or government primary schools in Hong Kong. The second stage involved in-depth interviews with 11 teachers and the collection of homework samples.

Homework was found to be utilised by all teachers participating in the study, who assigned various kinds of homework for various purposes while devoting a substantial amount of their time to homework-related activities. Participants reported holding strong beliefs in the benefits of homework to teaching and learning. They were able to articulate characterisics of English language homework practices and activities, which they believe to be effective in achieving their desired functions of homework. However, they sometimes doubted the efficacy of their current homework practices. Teachers' homework practices were often found to be standardised within a school, with teachers being required to

give the same homework as their colleagues teaching the same grade (Moorhouse, 2018b).

The data suggest that this standardisation arises from sociocultural and contextual considerations, such as school policies, parental expectations and cultural norms, and can limit teachers' ability to develop homework practices that meet students' needs.

Through the development of a conceptual framework, the study adds to our growing understanding of the pedagogical practice of homework within the Hong Kong context. Further research into this widespread teaching practice is needed.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Questionnaire and Interview Cover Notes and Consent Forms

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Information Sheet and Consent Form for Research - Questionnaire
Title: Homework in English language teaching – Hong Kong primary English language teachers'

beliefs and practices

Dear English Language Teacher,

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Exeter and would like to invite you to complete a questionnaire.

Details of Project:

As an English language teacher working in a primary school in Hong Kong, you are in a good position to give valuable insight into your homework practices and beliefs. Through this insight, I hope to get a better understanding of the current homework practices and beliefs as well as factors that may impact on the practices and beliefs of Hong Kong primary English language teachers. The anonymised data will be used in my thesis for my Doctorate of Education and may also be presented at conferences and published in journal articles. The questionnaire involves a number of questions about your practices, beliefs and other factors that may impact on your practices and beliefs. The questionnaire should take about 20-30 minutes to complete. As a token of my appreciation for participating in this project, you will receive a HKD$25 Coffee voucher.

Contact Details:

Name: Benjamin Luke Moorhouse
Postal Address: Room 650, Meng Wah Complex, The University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam, Hong Kong
Telephone: 90104478 or 3917 6105
E-mail: benmoorh@hku.hk or blm203@exeter.ac.uk

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact: Dr Philip Durrant, Senior Lecturer, The University of Exeter on: P.L.Durrant@exeter.ac.uk.

Confidentiality

Your responses to the questionnaire will be kept confidential. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act and relevant Hong Kong laws.

Anonymity

Questionnaire data will be held and used on an anonymous basis, with no mention of your name, but I will refer to you as a teacher in Hong Kong and some possible demographic data of the school, such as, medium of instruction, district, school type, and school size.

Data Storage

All hardcopy data will be securely stored in a lockable cabinet (with only the researcher holding the key) in a lockable office. All softcopy data will be stored as password protected files stored on University U- Drive. At the end of the project, hardcopy data will be retained for two years in a lockable cabinet and then destroyed. Softcopy data will be stored indefinitely on a password-protected computer and encrypted for long term storage.

Right to Withdraw

You have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without disadvantage. If you wish to withdraw, please send me an e-mail stating that you wish to withdraw and I will destroy any data you have previously provided.

Consent

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

- there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage;
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me;
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- all information I give will be treated as confidential;
- the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

........................…………….. ....
(Signature of participant) (Date)

…………………………… ……………………………………………
(Printed name of participant) (School name)

Participants' e-mail address: ……………………….. (Optional – Please complete if you wish to take part in the follow-up interview)

If you are willing to participate in a follow-up interview and complete a homework log, please tick this box ☐. Your help is greatly appreciated. Please include your e-mail address above.

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher.

Your participation will be greatly appreciated.

Many thanks,

Benjamin Luke Moorhouse

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Information Sheet and Consent Form for Research – Interview and Homework sample
Title: Homework in English language teaching – Hong Kong primary English teachers' beliefs and practices

Dear English Teacher,

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Exeter and would like to invite you to be interviewed and provide samples of the homework you give to your learners.

Details of Project:

As an English teacher working in a primary school in Hong Kong, you are in a good position to give valuable insight into your homework practices and beliefs. Through this insight, I hope to get a better understanding of the current homework practices and beliefs as well as factors that may impact on the practices and beliefs of Hong Kong primary English teachers. The data will be used in my dissertation for my Doctorate of Education. The data may also be presented at conferences and published in journal articles.

The inteview should take no more than 60 minutes with the possibility of a follow-up interview at a later date. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your homework practices, your beliefs about learning and homework and factors that impact on your homework practices and beliefs. Interviews will be arranged between 1st January 2017 and 15th July, 2017 at your convenience. Interviews will be audio-recorded for accuracy and ease of transcription. During the interview, I may ask you to share some samples of the homework you give to your learners.

Contact Details:

Name: Benjamin Luke Moorhouse
Postal Address: Room 650, Meng Wah Complex, The University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam, Hong Kong
Telephone: 90104478 or 3917 6105
E-mail: benmoorh@hku.hk or blm203@exeter.ac.uk

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact: Dr Philip Durrant, Senior Lecturer, The University of Exeter on: P.L.Durrant@exeter.ac.uk.

Confidentiality

Interview tapes and transcripts will be held in confidence. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). However, if you request it, you will be supplied with a copy of your interview transcript so that you can comment on and edit it as you see fit (please give your email below so that I am able to contact you at a later date). Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act and relevant Hong Kong laws.

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Anonymity

Interview data and homework samples will be held and used on an anonymous basis, with no mention of your name, but I will refer to you as a teacher in Hong Kong and some possible demographic data of the school, such as, medium of instruction, district, school type, and school size.

Data Storage

All hardcopy data will be securely stored in a lockable cabinet (with only the researcher holding the key) in a lockable office. All softcopy data will be stored as password protected files stored on University U- Drive. At the end of the project, hardcopy data will be retained for two years in a lockable cabinet and then destroyed. Softcopy data will be stored indefinitely on a password-protected computer and encrypted for long term storage.

Right to Withdraw

You have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without disadvantage. If you wish to withdraw, please send me an e-mail stating that you wish to withdraw and I will destroy any data you have previously provided.

Consent

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.
I understand that:

- there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage;
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me;
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- all information I give will be treated as confidential;
- the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

..............................………………..   ....
(Signature of participant)   (Date)

…………………………….   ………………………………………
(Printed name of participant)   (Email address of participant if they have requested to
                                                             view a copy of the interview transcript.)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher.

Your participation will be greatly appreciated.

Many thanks,

Benjamin Luke Moorhouse

Appendix 2 – Final Questionnaire

Official Use only: ID: 1	UNIVERSITY OF EXETER	Homework in English language teaching – Hong Kong primary English language teachers' beliefs and practices
		Primary English Language Teachers' Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire. I would like to find out your current English language homework practices and your beliefs about English language homework.

Benjamin Moorhouse
benmoorh@hku.hk / blm203@exeter.ac.uk

Part A) About you (Instructions: Please tick the appropriate box or answer the question)

		Male	Female
1	Gender		

		Under 25	26-35	36-45	46-55	Over 55
2	Age					

3	How many **years** of teaching experience do you have?	

		Primary 1	Primary 2	Primary 3	Primary 4	Primary 5	Primary 6
4	Levels currently teaching English language						

		TA	CM	GM	APSM	PSM/AM	Other (Please specify):
5	Rank						

6	Are you the English panel chair?	Yes /	No

		Diploma / Certificate	Associate degree / Higher Diploma	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Doctoral degree
7	Highest qualification you hold					

		None	CELTA / TESOL Cert	Bachelor degree	PGDE	Master's degree	Other (Please specify):
8.	What English language teaching qualification do you hold?						

Part B) About your English language homework practices (Instructions: Please tick the appropriate box or circle appropriate answer)

1. In a typical day, how many pieces of **English** homework do you give per class?

0	1	2	3	4	5	5+

2. Do you consider corrections (when students need to correct previous work) as a piece of homework?

Yes   /   No

3. On a typical day how long do you expect your students to spend on **English** homework?

0 mins	1-10 mins	11-20 mins	21-30 mins	31-40 mins	41-50 mins	More than 51 min (Please specify)

4. On a typical day, how long do you spend on homework related activities?

4.1: In the classroom (e.g. explaining, giving demos, giving feedback homework activities)	minutes per class
4.2: Out of the classroom (e.g. planning, selecting, making, marking homework activities)	minutes per class

5. Why do you give English homework? (Please read the statements and indicate how much you agree)

I regularly assign English homework for my students to…		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	…practice what has been taught in class				
2	….prepare students for upcoming tests or exams				
3	….prepare students for upcoming English lessons				
4	…finish work already started in class				
5	… apply recently learned material in a different context				
6	…help students develop study skills				
7	…help students develop time management skills				
8	…increase out of class peer interaction in English				
9	…provide information to parents on students' progress				
10	…provide information to me of my students' English progress				

5.11 Please state any other reasons for giving English homework to your students:

_____

6. What homework do you assign? (Please read the statements and indicate how much you agree)

	I regularly assign…	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	… English homework that require students to write				
2	… English homework tasks that have a right or wrong answer				
3	… English homework that require my students to talk in English				
4	…English homework that helps students memorize vocabulary				
5	… past exam papers and TSA papers for English homework				
6	…. reading comprehension activities for English homework				
7	…free reading (extensive reading) for English homework				
8	… penmanship for English homework				
9	… listening tasks for English homework				
10	… copying tasks for English homework				
11	… a variety of English homework tasks				
12	… open tasks (e.g. free writing / diary writing) as homework				
13	… vocabulary and grammar worksheets as homework				
14	… activities from the textbook or workbook for homework				

6.15 Please state any other English homework you regularly assign to your students:

_____

Part C) What are your beliefs about English homework? (Please read the statements and indicate how much you agree)

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Homework has a positive influence on English learning				
2	Homework helps students develop good study habits				
3	Homework helps students to build self-confidence in using English				
4	Teachers should set a variety of homework tasks				
5	Homework is necessary for learners to become effective English users				
6	The more time students spend on homework, the more they will learn				

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
7	Setting a large amount of homework is evidence of a rigorous curriculum				
8	Homework is more important than other non-academic activities				
9	English homework is as important as classwork				
10	Effective/good teachers set English homework regularly				
11	Homework helps inform students of their English learning progress				
12	Without homework, students would not use English outside of the classroom				
13	English homework negatively affects students' English learning				
14	It is important to set homework that challenges the learners				
15	Homework helps the teacher know more about their learners' abilities				
16	Homework has a negative effect on students interest in English				
17	Homework is a normal part of school life				
18	Homework helps my students perform better in examinations and tests				

C.19 Please state any other beliefs you have about English homework:

_____

Part D) **Influences on your homework practices.**

1. Why do you set English language homework?

2. Do you have any further comments on your homework practices or beliefs?

Thank you for your time ☺
Please return to Benjamin Moorhouse
Room 650, Meng Wah Complex,
Faculty of Education
The University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam, Hong Kong
benmoorh@hku.hk

Appendix 3: Initial codes for question D1 – Why do you set English language homework?

Codes	Quantity of responses
School policy / requirement of school / curriculum	44
Feedback for students on their learning and what they need to learn	10
Feedback to teachers / check understanding	74
Practice and consolidate learning	112
Students won't use English without English homework	4
Apply and use English outside of the classroom	19
challenge students	5
Encourage them to read in English	3
Extend learning	8
Encourage self-learning and learning habit	10
Develop motivation and interest in English	6
Parent expectations and provide evidence of learning to parents	16
Help learners prepare for lessons	7
Help learners prepare for assessments	11
Develop time management	1
Develop English skills	3
It's the norm	3

Appendix 4: Final Interview Guide

Homework in English language teaching – Primary English language teachers' beliefs and practices

Primary English Language Teachers' Interview Guide

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview. I would like to find out your current English language homework practices and your beliefs about English language homework, as well as, any influences on these practices and beliefs.

A) Demographic Questions

1. What can you tell me about your learners' family background, attitude, motivation, and ability?

2. What can you tell me about your schools' number of classes class size, teaching and learning culture?

B) Practices and beliefs

Tell me about your homework practices:

Possible guiding / follow-up questions:

1.   How do you plan, set and mark homework?

2.   What is the purpose(s) of homework?

3.   How much do you assign?

4.   What are the sources of your homework activities?

5.   Who decides what and how much homework you give? Why? (Prompt: homework policy)

6.   What do you consider when deciding your homework practices?

7.   Are your homework tasks compulsory or optional?

8.   What type of impact does homework have on your learners?

Tell me about your beliefs regarding homework:

Possible guiding / follow-up questions:

9.   What beliefs are your current homework practices based on?

10.   Where do you think these beliefs come from?

11.   How do you think these beliefs influence your homework practices?

13. Do your homework practices match your beliefs about homework? Why? Why not?

C) Influences on your practices

Students
1.   What learner factors impact on your homework practices? How?

2.   What are your students' views towards English homework?

3.   How do your students' views impact on your homework practices?

Parents
4.   What are parents' views towards English homework?

5.   How do your students' parents' views impact on your homework practices?

School Homework Policy
6.   What are the homework policies in your school?

7.   How do these policies impact on your homework practices?

8.   Do you have similar or different homework practices from other English teachers in your school? How? Why?

School Curriculum
9.   What are your school's English curriculum and assessment practices?

10.   How do these practices impact on your homework practices?

Own Educational Experience
11.   What kind of school did you go to when you were a child? Is it similar or different to your school that you teach in?

12.   What were your English language teachers' homework practices?

13.   How did you feel about homework when you were a child?

14.   How does your own experience of homework as a student impact on your homework practices now?

Culture and Society
15.   How do you think the general public in Hong Kong view homework?

16.   Where do you think these views come from?

17.   Do you think these views impact on your homework practices? How?

Training
18.   Did you receive training in homework practices?

- If yes, When? Who provided the training?
- Was the training useful? What did you learn
- Did this training impact on your homework practices? How?

- If no, would you like training on homework practices? Why?

19. Overall, what do you think are the biggest influences on your homework practices?

D) Homework sharing

Can you tell me about the homework samples you have with you?
1) Which ones are effective or not effective? Why do you think this?

Appendix 5 – Example of first phase of data analysis of interview data.

interviewer: What does homework mean to you? #00:04:30-8#

respondent: up to now, i think homework is a need for consolidating what students have learnt during the lessons or during a period of time so as a conclusion as a consolidation and maybe it is a feedback to teachers whether they have taught the children properly, the children learn correctly and they can use it correctly too. If not, through homework then part of it ok, teachers can notify what's wrong, what's going on and try to amend it. So for teachers, i think homework is needed, it's a kind of need. For students, i don't think homework is a pleasure thing, they don't like homework actually. #00:05:31-0#

benmoorh
Purpose – Practice / Consolidate learning

benmoorh
Purpose - Feedback to teachers

benmoorh
Belief – students do not enjoy homework

benmoorh

benmoorh
Belief - Homework is beneficial / necessary

interviewer: Why do you say that? #00:05:32-2#

respondent: i don't other school, for our school most of them can give you, they can finish the homework but without any, without good quality, for quantity ok, for quality still have time to improve it. #00:05:54-3#

benmoorh
Homework is done but without good quality

interviewer: right thank you. Let's move on then to homework. How would you yourself define homework? #00:04:30-3#

respondent: I think homework is something to mainly consolidate teaching and learning so because for our students are very young, they forget things easily so if they have something that remind them what they have learned and something that they could keep to, so they can go back to refer back, it would be very helpful I think. #00:04:56-5#

benmoorh
Purpose – Practice / Consolidate learning

interviewer: great, how do you plan what homework you will give to your students? #00:05:01-9#

respondent: usually we, everyday we will give out homework because almost everyday we have some new teaching points right? So if they don't have that we just worry they forget or they have to have the, we feel like, I feel like they need to have the routine of practicing and then, because English is not the very friendly subject to our students so regular practice is crucial. #00:05:41-3#

benmoorh
Belief - Homework is beneficial / necessary

interviewer: How do you decide which homework task to give, do you decide by yourself as a teacher or do you decide as a level? #00:05:50-1#

respondent: as a team, as a level, because we usually have workbook and

benmoorh
Practice – HWK tasks are mutually decided upon and designed at the year level

benmoorh
Practice – look at textbook / design tasks around its content

interviewer: What the source of your homework activities, where do they come from? #00:10:05-7#

respondent: just like i mention before, the textbook, it comes with its own exercise book and also we have our own school-based curriculum that we design our own stuff for the students to do like journal and then we've got our school based grammar worksheet and then comprehension worksheet which is also a book as well and we have a different selection of resources. We design some ourselves and then we look for some publishers exercise or even interest materials. #00:10:43-8#

Ben Moorhouse
Practice – look at textbook / design tasks around its content

Ben Moorhouse
Supplement with other materials

interviewer: What role do you think homework plays in your students' English learning? How does it help them to learn English? #00:10:50-4#

respondent: i think it is quite, helps us to reflect ourselves but also we can check and evaluate how our students learn, like i said, about 30% have got a domestic helpers and parents can English but that means other students don't have a chance to speak English or use English outside school, that's why i think it's also a good way for students who don't have a lot of resources to practices their English so i think it is quite important. #00:11:36-1#

Ben Moorhouse
Purpose – Practice / Consolidate learning

Ben Moorhouse
Purpose – give students chance to use English outside the classroom

Appendix 6 – List of Initial Themes Identified in Interview Data

Practices
- Practice – Quantity 3 pieces of homework
- Practice – quantity 2 pieces of homework
- Practice – provide time for students to do hwk in class
- Practice – look at textbook / design tasks around its content
- Practice – HWK tasks are mutually decided upon and designed at the year level
- Practice - principal and English panel chair decide homework
- Practice – all teachers give same/ similar hwk
- Practice – some students may get additional homework
- Practice – Discuss common errors/mistakes in class
- Practice – teachers homework practices are checked by senior teacher
- Practice - Feedback on homework – direct but not comprehensive
- Practice – Feedback on homework - comprehensive marking and grading
- Practice – Feedback on homework – depends on the task type

Beliefs
- Belief – students do not enjoy homework
- Belief - A disciplined teacher gives homework
- Belief – students are forced to do homework
- Belief - Homework is beneficial / necessary
- Belief – students shouldn't spend too long on homework
- Belief – T gives a suitable amount of homework
- Belief - Open-tasks and applying knowledge are more effective
- Belief – students should have ownership over the homework task / choices
- Belief – rote tasks not effective / meaningless
- Belief - Homework should be enjoyable
- Belief – Current homework practices aren't effective and don't lead to learning.
- Belief – homework should be something that can only be done at home
- Belief – students do not enjoy homework
- Belief – homework should be something familiar to the learners

Influences on practices
- Influence – Workload
- Influences – standardized homework
- Influence – school policy to have textbook
- Influence – EDB policy on homework
- Influence - Parents want standardised homework to be fairness and the test
- Influence - Culture – relationship between homework and success / exam scores
- Influence – parents expectations on quantity – reduce the amount
- Influence – parents expect homework
- Influence – schools are compared by the amount of homework the teachers assign

- Students enjoy hwk if the teacher makes it interesting
- Influence - students believe that homework leads to better marks
- Assign homework based on students' abilities
- Adjust homework if students don't find it interesting

Influences on beliefs
- Educational Experience –found own homework effective – lots of writing.
- Belief -homework helped them learn English
- Belief – Homework practices today are different from own experience
- No training on homework practices
- Influence – exposed to different educational contexts at university
- Not role to challenge homework practices
-

Relationship between Beliefs and Practices
The degree of freedom teachers have over their own practices;
- No autonomy over homework practices
- Have autonomy in the classroom
- Can provide additional homework
- Cannot provide additional homework

The similarities between teachers' beliefs and their practices.
- Homework practices do not match belief
- Homework practice and beliefs mostly match
- Changes would make to current practices
    - Would reduce amount
    - Would have more activities
    - Would reduce drilling mechanical homework
    - Would review policies
    - More open tasks e.g. 1 minute video

Finding / making space for beliefs
- Space is made in the classroom – how the hwk is introduced / feedback /marked etc.

Appendix 7 – Certificate of Ethical Approval

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

St Luke's Campus
Heavitree Road
Exeter UK EX1 2LU

http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Title of Project: Homework in English language teaching – Hong Kong primary English
                          language teachers' beliefs and practices

Researcher(s) name: Benjamin Moorhouse

Supervisor(s):   Phil Durrant
                          Emese Hall

This project has been approved for the period

                          From: 05/10/2016
                          To: 14/12/2020

Ethics Committee approval reference:

                          D/16/17/04

Signature: Date: 17/09/2016
(Professor Rupert Wegerif, Director of Research, Graduate School of Education)

Appendix 8 - Demographic Information of Survey Participants

Gender	Male *N* (%)		Female *N* (%)		
N = 279	38 (14)		241 (86)		

Age	≤25	26–35	36–45	46–55	>55
N = 265	*N* (%)	*N* (%)	*N* (%)	*N* (%)	*N* (%)
	0 (0)	89 (34)	120 (45)	40 (15)	16 (6)

Teaching experience (yrs)	≤5	6–10	11–15	16–20	>20
	N (%)	*N* (%)	*N* (%)	*N* (%)	*N* (%)
N = 265					
	54 (20)	52 (20)	41 (15)	66 (25)	52 (20)

Position	Teacher	Senior Teacher
N = 273	*N* (%)	*N* (%)
	153 (55)	120 (43)

English Panel Chair	English Panel Chair *N* (%)	Not English Panel Chair *N* (%)
N = 278	68 (24)	210 (76)

Highest qualification	Diploma / H. Diploma	Degree	Master's	Doctorate
N = 279	*N* (%)	*N* (%)	*N* (%)	*N* (%)
	7 (3)	169 (60)	101 (36)	2 (1)

Appendix 9 - Self-Reported Interview Participants' Demographics

Participant	Teacher Demographics					School Demographics			Student Demographics
	Gender	Age range	Teaching experience	Position	Highest qualification	Location	Size	Background	English ability, interest
Ann	Female	26–35	5 years	Teacher	Degree	Kowloon	Average-sized school: 4 classes in one grade	Majority are Cantonese-speaking local Chinese Families are from low-income backgrounds	Students have below standard English ability, based on public exam results
Chloe	Female	36–45	20 years	Teacher	PDGE	Hong Kong Island	Small school – 2 or 3 classes in one grade	Majority are Cantonese-speaking local Chinese Families are from low-income backgrounds	Students have a good attitude, and this increases their ability.
Joan	Female	36–45	13 years	English Panel Chair	PDGE	Hong Kong Island	Large-size school: 5 classes in one grade	Majority are Cantonese-speaking local Chinese Families are from middle-income backgrounds.	Students really enjoy English. They think English is fun.

Name	Gender	Age	Experience	Role	Qualification	Location	School	Students	Motivation
Winnie	Female	36–45	21 years	Teacher	PDGE	Kowloon	Average-sized school: 4 classes in one grade,	Majority are Cantonese-speaking local Chinese Families are from middle-income backgrounds	Low motivation to learn English
Peter	Male	46–55	25 years	Teacher	PDGE	Hong Kong Island	Small school; 2 or 3 classes in one grade	Majority are Cantonese-speaking local Chinese Families are from low-income backgrounds	Students not interested in English. Have little support or English at home.
Alice	Female	26–35	11 years	Teacher	Master's degree	Kowloon	Average-sized school: 4 classes in one grade	Majority are Cantonese-speaking local Chinese Families are from low-income backgrounds	Motivation is fair; students are more motivated to do paper-based work but less motivated to speak.

Mary	Female	36–45	18 years	English Panel Chair	Master's degree	New Territories	Average-sized school: 4 classes in one grade	Majority are Cantonese-speaking local Chinese. Students come from a wide range of backgrounds:	Most students are afraid of learning English
Alan	Male	36–45	18 years	English Panel Chair	Master's degree	Hong Kong Island	Small school; 2 classes per level;	Students are from low-income families; some have subsidies from the government.	More than 50% do not want to learn English. Students are 'below average'.
Jessi (M7)	Female	36–45	11 years	English Panel Chair	Master's degree	Kowloon	Large-size school: 5 classes in one grade	Students from school catchment area, middle class, very few students from China.	Students have a positive attitude towards English. However, their motivation depends on what is taught or what is assigned.

| Angela (M8) | Female | 36–45 | 20 years | English Panel Chair | Master's degree | New Territories | Large-size school: 5 classes in one grade | Most students are cross-border students from mainland China. | Some challenges adjusting to Hong Kong system |
| Rachel (M9) | Female | 36–45 | 14 years | English Panel Chair | Master's degree | Hong Kong Island | Large-size school: 5 classes in one grade; | Majority are Cantonese-speaking local Chinese. Mixed family backgrounds. | Students are quite motivated. |

Appendix 10 - Final themes generated in response to RQ 1 with corresponding data from questionnaire and interviews

Theme	Sub-theme (codes)	Related Questionnaire item(s)	Data samples – questionnaire (open-ended)	Data samples – Interview	Homework samples
Quantity of Homework Teachers Assign Their Learners	(number of pieces, time expected to be spent, , amount dependent on complexity; day of the week; amount assigned already by other teachers)	B1, B3	In every term, we set a fixed amount of homework (exercise books, school-based worksheet / writing) In order to finish all of them. I would try my best to evenly give out homework to students (i.e. 3-4 pieces per day) Otherwise, students may need to rush to finish the homework before assessments / exams as they need to do revision on the exercises which were homework.	Usually on average on one cycle 3 pieces of homework, but having said that, they have done most of the homework in class, so I would say time wise when I do give them homework its ranges from 10 min to half an hour. (Joan) I think maximum 2 but sometimes if we assign three [but one of the homework is corrections so I don't think corrections would count (Winnie) 2-3 pieces each day. And I expect that not more than 30 minutes they have to finish	N/A

				because it's a long day for them to go to school and then there are so many subjects. (Angela)	
Purposes of the Homework Teachers Assign	**Practice or consolidate**	B5 (I-10)	It is because students can practice what has been taught in class through homework. I think homework is a consolidation of what thy have learned in class. Without homework, they will forget the knowledge quickly. To help students internalise what they have learnt in lessons so to renifoce their memory. to consolidate what students have learnt	I think first of all they can practice what they have learnt at school and also at the time when they do their homework, they can remember what they have learnt (Mary) I think homework is something to mainly consolidate teaching and learning so because our students are very young, they forget things easily so if they have something that reminds them what they have learned and something that they could keep to, so they can go back to refer back, it would be very helpful I think (Rachel)	N/A

			I think a right amount of homework helps consolidate students' learning.	I think homework is, to consolidate what they have learnt in the lesson (Ann)	
	Provide feedback on teachers' teaching and/or students' learning		Homework is a means to allow students to use English in written form outside of classroom. It also gives teachers a record to keep track of students' progress. I set homework in English because I want my students to learn effectively so that they can review their learning, progress and evaluaet their learning outcome from time to time. It also allows teachers to understand students' learning progress (If	I think homework is something tangible to show the teacher how well the students have understood that concept (Joan) I think homework is a good chance for both teachers and students to learn from each other because students can learn from teacher's feedback (Winnie) And I think the purpose of homework is not only to evaluate students learning but to reflect how we taught (Jessi)	N/A

			students do their homework with others' assistance (e.g. tutors, parents…)	Let me know how much they learn in the lesson. (Ann)	
			because it can provide me information and feedback about my students accopplishments develop motivaton and mastery of learning		
			I want to understand students' difficuties in learning		
	School requirements (school policy and curriculum requirements)		School instruct that we must at least one homework for Students to do everyday. It's a school requirement. Parents also ask for homework for their children.	actually, by the school policy. I have to do workbook, grammar, penmanship, but in my classroom only a few penmanship. But for example, some of the teacher will do penmanship (Alan)	

			It is because it is the school practice. Every class, thus, needs to hand in much homework even for lower ability class It's mainly school polcy. Homework has its own value. - it helps students in a away to shape students' learning. It's necessary. Yet, I would appreicate a variety of homework types.	The English panel has target homework for students to do to consolidate their learning. And then mainly the class timetable, class timetable is very important. Sometimes we got three English lessons in one day, and sometimes we got one. And then you divide the homework and then you have to see … we have so [much] homework for one unit and then you have to carefully design which day you have to do more, what kind of homework you have to ask students to do. (Angela)	
	Parents' expectations or to provide evidence to parents		Parents also expect students to do homework too. FOr revision, school policy, parent's expectations (Especially Chinese	[Parents believe] the more [homework] they do the better marks they get; I think its public pressure and their concept over the past years (Winnie)	

| | | | Society) I prefer class work rather than homework

Parent's belief and requests

For me designing homework in English is due in large part to the extend school policy and widespread deeprooted belief among teachers and parents alike that homework is genuinely reflective of Ss current progress and in turn their performance in certain subjects in exam at the end of every term. While such beliefs might not necessarily hold water, we carry on as we have been for at least the last twenty years, as far as I'm concerned. | I will kind of tend to do what parents expect, to be honest…because you don't have, you don't want parents to think you are lazy teacher right?... yes, but although sometimes you are doing something that you think maybe not really helping, they learn, ah you still do it. (Rachel)

And we want to let their parents and private tutors to know what they are learning so they can help them. (Mary) | |

	Extend student learning of English outside the classroom		to extend pupils' learning outside classroom to provide opportuties for students to use English in daily practice I hope students will read English books at home so I assign extensive reading homewok. Without homework, students do not have the motivation to do anything about English at home.	English but that means other students don't have a chance to speak English or use English outside school, that's why i think it's also a good way for students who don't have a lot of resources to practices their English so i think it is quite important (Jessi) English, I think especially for English they give homework because they will not speak English at home, so nothing they can do if there is nothing related to English when they are at home (Ann)	
	Study habits		A meaningful homework tasks helps to consolidate what students have learnt in the lesson time and can it can also be a task to develop students' self-learing habits.	Because when you are assigning homework you have to make sure that students can access appropriate tools…, i think all these are important to prepare them to be self-directed learner. This is the ultimate goal. (Winnie)	N/A

			Learning is a habit. A small amount og homework can help students develop a habit of visitng what they have learnt.		
Type of homework assigned	**Variety of homework activities** (writing focused, skills-based)	C6.1-13	book report watch phonic videos play online games related to English read aloud	And there can be different forms, for example, I ask them to go home and read aloud something, go home and spell some words and then you do online learning programme and you do pen and paper like exercise and then I'll see that as homework. (Alice)	Analysis of homework type (Table X)
Sources of Homework Activities Assigned by Teachers	(Textbook and supplementary materials, teacher-made)	C6.14	In HK, it's regular to give homework like 'grammar', 'workbook' 'worksheets' etc.	actually when we do the co plan we go through the textbook together and usually there are some suggested tasks and we will take them as a reference and then we will design a task (Mary)	Analysis of homework source (Table 14)

				I think half of the homework are from the textbooks, from supplementary exercises, (Winnie)	
				We design some ourselves and then we look for some publishers exercise or even interest materials. (Jessi)	
				Well its all according to the units we work with in the textbook, so we sort of work backwards, so we look at the Magic textbook and sort of see what are the grammar items, what are the vocabulary items and we work backwards … 'well the homework we give is, what's found in the test and exam is reflective of the homework that we do give (Joan)	
	Collaboratively	N/A	N/A	just the way we do the homework is we delegate, at the beginning of the term we	N/A

| Deciding homework activities | | | | divide up all the different numbers of worksheets so its just every teacher will have the chance to create a new worksheet or edit an existing worksheet, I guess that's the only policy we have and that gets passed around all the other teachers.(Winnie)

so basically at the beginning of the year, all of us sit down to have a look of what to cover and what not to cover and at that time, basically we have a rough idea of which idea of which homework to assign students to do. But when we are teaching after i teach something i will assign some homework related to what teach in class. Actually this is how we decide, how i decide what homework to give them (Jessi) | |

				as a team, as a level, because we usually have workbook and our supplementary worksheet we call supplementary learning resources and then we also have like penmanship or other revision kind of homework but mainly school based designed materials (Rachel)	
	Hierarchically	N/A	To some extent, teachers have to follow the 'system. In HK, it's regular to give homework like 'grammar', 'workbook' 'worksheets' etc. Teachers have not much flexibility in designing the tasks… . As there are already sets of homework that students need to compete, if I set other varieties of homework, they would become extra	That depends on my lesson and I think it depends on the homework too, because they are very correlated, because I already have the set homework, so when i teach i will teach what they need to do in the homework, so that the homework can help them, and the homework is designed according to the textbook. (Ann) I think [the homework policy] is like established for a long time, a few years time. She of course she is the, because the panel	N/A

			workload for both students and teachers.	head was away for few years, vice principal also took responsibility being the panel head, but everything comes from her. And what I think is she is not a person who really go out and see, she will…you know, the frog under the well, you know that saying in Chinese? (Alice)	
Time Spent by Teachers on Homework Related Activities	**Inside the classroom** (explaining, allowing students to start homework, giving feedback on homework)	B4.1	N/A	And then for some we will try to find the mistakes so we will, we do peer evaluation during the class. and then after writing we have post happy writing? (Mary)

I have to do more than half [the homework activity] with them in class (Peter) | N/A |
| | **Outside the classroom** (Comprehensive Marking) | B4.2 | N/A | We do mark every mistake and for example if there are 10 questions we will write down the fraction on it or for handwriting or penmanship we give them grades. We've got | N/A |

| | | | | the exact number of questions we will give the fraction. (Jessi)

for grammar exercise, i think we just mark them, but for writing, we give feedback. (Alan)

of course we mark mistakes because this is homework not writing for writing its not a homework we do it in the class, so that's why i didn't mention. (Ann) | |

Appendix 11 - Final themes generated in response to RQ 2 with corresponding data from questionnaire and interviews

Theme	Sub-theme (codes)	Related Questionnaire item(s)	Data samples – questionnaire (open-ended)	Data samples – Interview
Assigning homework is the duty of a teacher	(disciplined teacher gives homework, professional duty of a teacher, do not question school practices)	C11, C17	it is part of my duty. I am an English teacher. For me designing homework in English is due in large part to the extend school policy and widespread deep-rooted belief(s) among teachers and parents … While such beliefs might not necessarily hold water, we carry on as we have been for at least the last twenty years, as far as I'm concerned.	…we are asked to do something, just like when you go to school you have to do homework and you are told homework helps you. So the teacher believe it is like this and the child also believe it is like this.(Chloe) So no one specially check your homework to some extend it depends on your self-discipline for teachers and pupils (Peter)
Homework is beneficial and necessary	(necessary, essential, promotes learning, makes students use English, makes them	C1, C2, C3, C5, C6 C9, C11, C12,	Homework is a 'must' for students, however, I don't think 'more is better'.	I think homework is a good chance for both teachers and students to learn from each other because students can learn from teacher's feedback (Winnie)

| | study, provides feedback to teachers, keeps English learning in students' minds,) | C13, C15, C16, C18 | As a way for students to practice skills and knowledge taught in class! to develop passion for the subject outside the classroom. Also to share with parents what exactly their child is learning. Giving the chance for parents to become involved learning and teaching through child's school life.

Without doing homework, students may forget most of the things they have learnt in class.

more homework may not result in better academic results!

Having some homework is essential to students' learning. However, having too much homework would definitely discourage students' interest. Without homework, students do not have the motivation to do anything about English at home. | …homework provide the purpose, they should know, "oh today I have learned these kind of elements." And the second is they need to get the practice, more about that is to consolidate what they have learned (Angela)

I think they have to recall their memory at home. So for example, at school they learn to use 'too many' or 'too much' but you just have 30 minutes for a lesson then they can't digest everything maybe they forget something easily (Mary)

I feel like they need to have the routine of practicing and then, because English is not the very friendly subject to our students so regular practice is crucial. (Rachel)

I think especially for English they give homework because they will not speak English at home, so nothing |

				they can do if there is nothing related to English when they are at home (Ann)
Characteristics of effective English language homework activities	**Provide for free language use** (creative, meaningful, personal responses, student ownership, choice)	N/A	Students might do more assignments that let them be creative and think out of the box. Less drilling exercises. Setting some more meaningful tasks as homework may ease students' negatively towards doing homework Constructive (not rote memorisation) HW should be given - more chances to use English concepts in ways that are authentic and allow students to be in control of the quality of HW submitted (i.e. writing paragraphs, constructing sentences) instead of gap fill / cloze passage types of exercise.	…students do post learning, they are given a lot of autonomy, they could, we basically give them a theme or topic and they choose what they like to do … sometimes in groups, sometimes individually. Then, I think that kind of homework … helps learning so much because they have so much ownership in terms of what they're doing and they are learning so many other things…(Rachel) …If you let them have some ownership in their homework like, if you say 'oh today we are doing a piece of writing then you can choose the topic you like, if you don't like to do a piece of writing, maybe you can make a chart, maybe you can collect some information from books' and this will provide different styles and ways but still the object is the same. They

| | | | | Open-ended homework e.g. free writing promote a genuine usage of language and is more effective in arousing interest. | still need to finish the task but present it in different ways. I think they would find it more meaningful. Meaningful [work] is very important…(Winnie)

 Homework is more effective when students have a mission and purpose: This boy very fat and how can you help him to become thin so they have got [a] purpose, [to create an] advertisement: How to help him to be healthy? And write some comments, like some pictures … so kind of fun and flexible. If they want to draw more things, no problem; if they want to write only a little, no problem. So that is totally up to them. And I think this kind of homework is quite effective. Even though they might not be good at doing the one thing, but then they will try hard because it is kind of fun. And I enjoy using that kind of thing, task-based learning, to try and teach them and they learn quite effectively as well. (Jessi) |

	Are enjoyable, interesting and relevant (fun, engaging, interesting, relevant)	N/A	So designing something fun, interesting yet fruitful is one of my beliefs when I set my homework. I really hope my students enjoy doing some homework tasks.	So English, for me, I think it can be fun. I try to present it in a fun way, where you know so you can see other works like crosswords, using vocabulary, or it could, this one is [shows example] identify, rather than actually write, draw circles, wiggle lines, brackets … but to identify it, so I think it challenges the students to do homework in a different way as opposed to filling in the blanks, which I could do as well but would not be as exciting. (Joan) We have to set authentic tasks relating to their needs, their lives, their interests. Like if you ask them to write about their favourite movie star . . . If you ask them to write about Jackie Chan, I don't think they would have interest because they have no idea who he is. So there should be something related to their lives. (Jessi)

				if they need to spend too much time on homework this is very discouraging. Because we don't want the students to see English as their big burden, we want them to find learning English is fun , it's enjoyable, so we try our best to try to make English homework as interesting as possible. #00:10:36-6# (Winnie) …They each the video on Youtube. Writing exercises and stuff like that. And this is a piece of homework were they use the recycled materials to make clothes like that. Actually everything is related. That's why i said, if i could change something, it's probably of the quality definitely not the quantity. They all loved it! This is what i want to share (Jessi)
	Take a variety of forms (different skills, different activities)	C4	Homework is necessary but we need to think of a variety of it. Speaking, reading, and watching movies can be homework as long as we have follow-up activities.	Homework is not only focus on written assignments, but also on reading aloud, doing projects, e-learning and so on (Jessi)

			I think sometimes homework could also be fun i.e. watch an English movie and write a report. It doesn't always have to be about doing worksheets. A variety of the 'format' of HW is necessary - oral, writing ,listening, different text types… Teachers should try to incorporate HW into real-life applications, e.g. making interview questions for tourists / big sisters in school and really go and interview them afterwards… I believe research-based or non-written homework like making videos or reading freely could be more beneficial!	So English for me I think it can be fun. I try to present it in a fun way, where you know so you can see other works are like crosswords, using vocabulary or it could, this one is (show example) identify, rather than actually write, draw circles, wiggle lines, brakes… but to identify it, so I think it challenges the students to do homework in a different way as a pose to fill in the blanks which i could do as well but would not be as exciting (Joan)

	Achievable (easy, cater for diversity)	C14	Homework should be easy and simple so that students can get satisfaction from it. Teachers need to take special care when assigning homework. If the homework assignment is too hard, is perceived as busy work, or takes too long to complete, students might tune out resist doing it. Never send home any assignments that students cannot do. It can be tiered assignments to let students of different capabilities to progress from their level towards students more advanced levels. Different levels of difficulties could be considered for students with different level of learning ability.	i think one of the factors is the students readiness and abilities, if we are setting the homework that is new to them, something not taught in the classroom. I think they can never get it done at home. I think homework should be something they've seen, they've learned. it should not be something new to them. (Winnie) …If they find it very easy to complete, they are more motivated to do the homework… (Ann)

| Characteristics of effective English language homework practices | **Appropriate amount** (reduces time to relax, demotivates learners, reduce interest in English) | C6, C7, C17 | I do think homework can consolidate what they have learnt in class. But I do agree that students nowadays have too much homework

Right amount of homework.

Same as physical exercise, a well-balanced workload can help to reinforce students' learning skills

Too much homework will ruin the interest of learning. To decide the amount of homework is very essential.

it shouldn't be a burden.

I agree suitable amount of homework helps students to learn better but too much homework | I think homework is good for student but we cannot give too much homework because students should have a balance life too, they should have some time to relax…(Ann)

if they need to spend too much time on homework this is very discouraging. Because we don't want the students to see English as their big burden, we want them to find learning English is fun , it's enjoyable, so we try our best to try to make English homework as interesting as possible (Winnie)

I think students have to have their, have to have more free time they need to play. Yeah, I think our children they spend too much time on learning, they really spend too much time on learning. They need to have a life. (Rachel) |

			will become a pressure for students or lower their learning interests.	for my English homework, less than 30 minutes. Actually my homework is not so much. The workload is not very heavy. I think most of them, even the less able one, can finish it in 30-45 minutes. For the those smart ones they can do it in 10-15 minutes (Peter)
	Clear instructions and guidance (ensure learners are not insecure, discuss common errors in class, teach how to do homework, demonstration)	N/A	Support students to finish their homework with 'clues' is meaningful. The 'clues; is an art.

Sufficient guidance / instruction is crucial. | , so when I teach I will teach what they need to do in the homework,… (Ann)

It is important that homework makes students feel successful, so they think, "oh, I really learn[ed] something in the lesson, I can complete the homework by myself" after they received the homework from me" (Ann).

… we usually discuss it in class, we will talk with your classmates, usually oral practice first and then write at home…(Joan) |

				'I will teach the target language then we will do a few questions together then I will give them the rest to do at home' (Chloe)
				in my school we have to explain very well what you are doing, what they are going to do and where they can get the reference (Angela)
	Timely feedback and opportunities for sharing (sharing in class, feedback in class, corrections not useful, provide space for peer learning)	N/A	Homework with immediate and positive feedback can make teaching and learning more effective… teachers usually only give corrective feedback to students, so students may only focus on correcting the errors they make, but not ways to improve their language skills. . It's very important to teach students how to do corrections. I always show them their homework on visualuzer and explain and it really works.	… I will check it by myself and i will mark it one by one and if i find some common mistakes then i will show them in the classroom, telling them most of you have done it wrongly, why, try and ask them to figure out the reasons why and try and improve it,…(Peter) … homework should be something that can provide teachers with a chance to give students maybe immediate feedback, like if I mark their homework and then in the lesson the next say, I can focus on their common mistakes …(Mary)

			Also, I must / always do modelled writing students to share their shared writing and guided work with the class. Then, they can learn from peers.	I will, instead of marking, I bring the homework back and spend time with them and tell them why is that and what skills. So that will inform me about how well they are doing and then their readiness and next time I will adjust. (Rachel)
Teachers should have autonomy to design homework	(teacher designed more effective, less rigid)	N/A	we should be more flexible about homework in terms of amount and kinds depending on different students who have different abilities I think teachers should have their free choice to decide which and how much homework to their class according to the ability of the class due to the 'rules' or 'practice', teacher and students suffer too. But in the end, I think homework is really useful for teachers to keep track of Ss' learning progress.	Here is not. But really actually we don't have time to plan extra thing for students here because it's too busy. So having taught in three different schools, now I really feel one way yes you have freedom to do everything you choose and you enjoy it so much but they are weak. In writing in terms of assessment result they are so pushy but they can work something out but they are very weak in language using. In between the two, to be critical, they have certain amount of homework, certain amount of time to think for fun. (Alice)

			It is very important to assign the right level of homework for students. Our school designs most of the worksheet for the students. Actually students, especially lower form, quite like the worksheet decided by the teachers. Homework should not be set rigidly. It should be designed from students' perspectives and it should be flexibly amended.	

Negative beliefs about current practices	No or limited autonomy for teachers regarding their homework practices	N/A	not much room for teachers set homework freely due to tight curriculum. Meaningful homework is important but there are a lot of 'set homework' to be completed.	No autonomy! For activities yes, but for homework no. Even if it is something that i want to give to my class separately, that, I could perceive as something useful. I have to do it secretly and tell the class, don't tell anybody else that i've give you this. Because they want everything to be standardized (Joan) In terms of homework, I can do no changes. But then I can change the way, I can just use my way of teaching to have positive influence. (Alice) because we cannot choose, they have to accept this (Ann)
	Quantity of homework (too much, burden of teachers and students)	N/A	But I do agree that students nowadays have too much homework	if I can change some students, maybe they need less homework because they cannot handle well (Rachel) For example penmanship, they need to copy each word six times and they, there are 16 words, of course the

| | | | Homework should be cut or given time for students to finish them during school time so that they can whatever they want after school.

There is no need to assign H.W. to students every day. Giving them taking challenge instead of keeping them busy.

Not much room for teachers set homework freely due to tight curriculum. Meaningful homework is important but there are a lot of 'set homework' to be completed. | first time I will ask them to copy one to eight, half of it, and then each word six times, and then they need to make a sentence, so I think it's too much for some students. So I think maybe they can just copy each three times, because I think maybe some students are not good at writing but they can use other method to memorise the spelling. (Ann)

useful one but not a must. If i am the education minister, head of the EDB (Eddie Um), I would review the policy of homework, i would review the policy of examination and also maybe the curriculum of Hong Kong, especially primary school, it is much burden imposed on students. (Peter). |
| **Type of homework** (mechanical drilling, writing**)** | N/A | Beliefs are different from practice - I have to give a lot of written homework, according to school requirements. | well hopefully they will understand how to use it, but the reality remains they are able to do the homework if it's compartmentalized into a worksheet, so if one worksheet makes sense they know how to do it, when |

| | | | I don't like penmanship and copying. However, drilling is necessary sometimes.

If possible, let students write less and read more. If write, less copying and more free writing.

Teachers shouldn't give too much homework or manipulative exercises to kill interest

Also, I prefer students reading more to writing or drilling especially in lower forms (P1-2). | one worksheet is model verbs. they know how to do it. The problem is they don't know how to apply it, and they don't that makes sense that (incomprehensible) model verbs can be reused together in the same paragraph and they are all interrelated so the students are able to understand the homework but again, not use it. So their impact is, like want to say, not impactful, but in the long, in the grand scope of things, i don't necessarily think the way we do homework impacts the students in terms of them actually understanding what it is for. (Joan)

basically but then when it comes to like thinking skills critical thinking, not really good coz they just have a lot of drilling and then that makes sense why I think school practice in this school is not very really good. (Alice) |

				because i think because i think some times i think if we need to change because we still have a lot of work like handwriting or penmanship which students spend a lot of time on it. (Mary)
				the only thing that i would like to change is not the quantity or the frequency, it would be the quality. If i could change, I would definitely make the homework more meaningful, purposeful and more interesting, but then just like for one I don't have time, for two, i don't really have any training on how to set quality or meaningful homework and that's a big problem (Jessi)
				home reader, why not? but some teachers argue that how about if they don't read? I would say we must have positive thinking. Written form we have fairness but home reading, why do we promote reading, why because we do not trust the students and also for

				readings. If we do not promote it, when they grow up, they can't learn, they will just copy like copy cats. (Alan)
	No time allocated to completion of Homework at School	N/A	Homework should be cut or given time for students to finish them during school time…	I want them to do the homework in class, yes, because when they go back home, they have many after lessons already. Then they forget and then they have to pick it up again. And I think if the consolidation come right after the learning, it's much more effective. (Rachel)
			I would like to suggest homework can be done in school, even set the time about 60 min at school regularly per day for students completing their homework. Teacher can help more individually for the low-ability students.	
			Maybe homework should be completed during school time!	

| | Students do not like current practices (forced to do, a lot of work) | N/A | N/A | i think homework is needed, it's a kind of need. For students, i don't think homework is a pleasure thing, they don't like homework actually (Peter)

they don't really like homework, as I told you. Coz it's a lot of work for them, a lot of sentences, a lot questions, a lot of writing. They are all about writing, a lot of writing and re-writing so…(Alice)

In the, rationally, they know it will help them but at the same time like, you know, not everybody enjoy works out right? But they know it's good for them so from, they will do it anyway right? (Rachel) |

Appendix 12 - Final themes generated in response to RQ 3 with corresponding data from questionnaire and interviews

Influences on Practice

Theme	Sub-theme (codes)	Data samples – questionnaire (open-ended)	Data samples – Interview
School policies, norms and expectations	**Standardized practices and activities** (Same homework activities as colleagues, school monitoring practices – book checking, school marking and feedback policies, can't assign other kinds of homework)	Each school has its own English curriculum with homework policy. To some extent, teachers have to follow the 'system. In HK, it's regular to give homework like 'grammar', 'workbook' 'worksheets' etc. Teachers have not much flexibility in designing the tasks… I have to give a lot of written homework, according to school requirements. My homework practices are actually strongly restricted by the requirements given by the school. As there are already sets of homework that students need to compete, if I set other varieties of homework, they would	And the school expect you so much, the society expect you so much, the exam expects you so much, and you feel like it's your responsibility, because if you don't do it, nobody else will do it right? (Rachel) No autonomy! … Because they want everything to be standardized (Joan) I It's just like China or North Korea, (laughing) homework is to make sure they have enough drilling so they can pass in exams… In terms of homework, I can [make] no changes. (Alice) actually, by the school policy. I have to do workbook, grammar, penmanship, but in my classroom only a few

		become extra workload for both students and teachers.	penmanship. But for example, some of the teacher will do penmanship (Alan)
		In every term, we set a fixed amount of homework (exercise books, school-based worksheet / writing) In order to finish all of them. I would try my best to evenly give out homework to students (i.e. 3-4 pieces per day) Otherwise, students may need to rush to finish the homework before assessments / exams as they need to do revision on the exercises which were homework.	The English panel has target homework for students to do to consolidate their learning. And then mainly the class timetable, class timetable is very important. Sometimes we got three English lessons in one day, and sometimes we got one. And then you divide the homework and then you have to see … we have so [much] homework for one unit and then you have to carefully design which day you have to do more, what kind of homework you have to ask students to do. (Angela)
		It's mainly school policy. Homework has its own value. - it helps students in a way to shape students' learning. It's necessary. Yet, I would appreciate a variety of homework types.	

		School's set homework requirements which may involve activities which are not useful i.e. rote memorization. It is because it is the school practice. Every class, thus, needs to hand in much homework even for lower ability class I was told to assign homework according to the syllabus / scheme of work. I would assign homework if really meaningful.	
	Textbook and assessments dominated curriculum (correlated, regular tests, plan around textbook,	I set homework related to the textbook. The homework assigned for students is related to what they have learnt that day. It can reflect	How do I plan? That depends on my lesson and I think it depends on the homework too, because they are very correlated, because I already have the set homework, so when

	assessment based on homework and textbook content)	how well students have learnt / how I can improve my teaching.	I teach I will teach what they need to do in the homework. (Ann)
		the purpose of setting homework is mainly to revise the lesson content (for test and exams), also to enrich pupils English knowledge like 'word bank'.	I think homework is unavoidable, that we have to give homework to students and its, … I think it is unavoidable because the way we assess and teach is quite different from other countr[ies] and basically our students are test[ed] on what they learned in school so that it's essential for them to have homework in Hong Kong education system. (Jessi)
		I want my students can do well in the examination.	
			So basically, we have one or two teachers set the test or exam and we pass it around and then sometimes we say how come [the content] cannot be found in the homework and therefore we need to make sure the assessment reflects the homework we assigned. (Joan)
		To revise the previous knowledge regularly, to prepare for dictation, assessment and examination To use English outside of the classroom.	
			actually, when we do the co plan we go through the textbook together and usually there are some suggested tasks and we

			will take them as a reference and then we will design a task, like this one (showing example) (Mary)
			the textbook, it comes with its own exercise book and also we have our own school-based curriculum that we design our own stuff for the students to do like journal and then we've got our school based grammar worksheet and then comprehension worksheet which is also a book as well and we have a different selection of resources. We design some ourselves and then we look for some publishers' exercise or even interest materials. (Jessi)
			most likely the book content, the textbook content and then when the exam is closer we will think, what we plan to assess most likely they are grammar points, we will gather some grammar drilling exercise and let them be the support before exams, generally it was designed according to the textbook,

			like workbook, like grammar and then the curriculum are textbook based and then the penmanship will be. (Chloe)
	Heavy Workload / tight curriculum (Teachers lack class time, assigning meaningful homework takes time, assign homework that's easier to mark)	We don't have enough time to finish all the stuff at school. That's why they need to do some at home. We don't have enough lesson time for practicing the English language items. Homework sometimes can help to consolidate.	… when I first approached my principal about changing (the homework) and adding like a section which was more open ended for example model verbs use the word can to express ability in a sentence kind of thing, even my principal was like, well that might be a little bit hard because she didn't want the teachers to mark extra work…. (Joan) I have too less time to chase of the syllabus (Ann) the number of lessons and input they get does not match the expectations. Like we expect a lot from students but we not giving them enough… so the homework can help that way, not a very healthy way but ha-ha (Rachel) … because we have to chase the curriculum, because of school holidays or rehearsal, we are chasing the time because

			we set the assessment a little bit early before we finish everything, so for that particular period before the assessment we will rush everything, and maybe in that period we will give extra homework to catch up with everything. (Jessi)
	School policy on quantity of homework activities (1-2 pieces a day, policy that teachers assign more homework at weekend and holidays, policy to ensure students do not receive too much homework)	School instruct that we must at least one homework for Students to do every day. On the one hand, students' performance in homework can reflect their learning progress or problem to a certain extend. On the other hand, it's not really up to a teacher to decide how much homework he/she is going to set (The amount of homework is set by schools, mostly.)	Well, sometimes usually 2-3, because every, so I said they would need to do 4 penmanship in 2 weeks, that's 2 times a week, they will do it every Wednesday and Friday. And then for worksheets like this, sometimes we do 1 worksheet plus a lot of corrections or two worksheets plus corrections and recollections, so all along you will see two kinds worksheets, recollections corrections on the blackboards. (Alice) yeah but we have a policy in our school for holiday or for weekend we have to give more homework to students…. for core subjects, English, Chinese, Maths. we have at least one piece of homework per day, each day, and if have a holiday or during weekend we need to need at least two, it depends on

			the duration of the holiday. We have a five-day holiday we need to have five pieces of homework. (Mary)
			but in our school actually there is long holiday homework that is standardized, every class will be the same. We will have a note and we will print it out. For example, P4 for summer holidays, they will need to finish exercise book page 10, 12 page 30 and listening task this and that and write a book report and then so it's basically standardized. (Jessi)
			we have, like a norm policy that we have at least 2 pieces of homework, like main subjects, English, Chinese, Maths and General studies which correction is not included. it is a policy, which is only in quantity, but I think the curriculum leads the quality, so the amount is followed by that policy. (Chloe)
Parents' expectations and	**Parents expectations** (views of fairness, parents own experience, parents relate	Parents often hold that more homework set to students mean they can learn better.	Parents have complained because parents in my school are fairly competitive and especially now in the age of WhatsApp and different chat groups all you know, oh my student from

| opinions about homework. | hwk to academic success. schools that give more homework are better) | Actually, it is said homework has a negative effect on students' interest in English. But parents may think it is the evidence of learning of kids.

…Parents also ask for homework for their children.

For revision, school policy, parent's expectations (Especially Chinese Society) I prefer class work rather than homework

Parent's belief and requests.

a) parents' wish b) school's policy

For me designing homework in English is due in large part to the extend school policy | 5B got this worksheet, how do it. And then maybe another parent from 5C will say oh I never got that worksheet, is it on the exam? Is it on the test? So, the way we set the worksheets and give the worksheets has to be very timely manner everyone in the same cycle has to be on the same time plan. (Joan)

[Parents believe] the more [homework] they do the better marks they get; I think its public pressure and their concept over the past years (Winnie)

it is so difficult [to change the homework] because we are now so exam oriented and the parents are mainly concerned about the exam results. Like this one, maybe for my view I think the design is quite interesting and quite efficient but for parents maybe the kind is quite difficult for them to do revision and maybe it is not the format here using is different from the exam paper so they may not feel happy if we just do tasks and |

| | | and widespread deep-rooted belief among teachers and parents alike that homework is genuinely reflective of Ss' current progress and in turn their performance in certain subjects in exam at the end of every term. While such beliefs might not necessarily hold water, we carry on as we have been for at least the last twenty years, as far as I'm concerned. | without giving them some exam oriented questions or paper to do.(Mary)

[Parents feel the more homework the better] because [in] the Mainland Chinese situation, most of parents told us that in Mainland, they have their elder brothers in mainland, and they are in HK. They compare their English standard, they like the HK way to teach more than Mainland [because] they think that their kids cannot understand all the things (Angela) |
| | | fulfill the requirement of parents / the school

Because we have to! school policy partly because of parents demand it!

Parents also expect students to do homework too. | You cannot say or ask the school to give you less homework and some parents might think, maybe do less homework, the students cannot learn well. (Ann)

I will kind of tend to do what parents expect, to be honest…because you don't have, you don't want parents to think you are lazy teacher right?... yes, but although |

			sometimes you are doing something that you think maybe not really helping, they learn, ah you still do it. (Rachel) in such a sense, [parents think] that teacher is so lazy, do not give much homework and do not mark it carefully. (Chloe) you know if the curriculum or teaching workload is not much to students or teachers, I believe most teachers, they can figure out some meaningful homework, just like new Zealand, they can do a project work for the whole year, For the whole year they fulfil one to two projects, that's enough how come we cannot do it in Hong Kong because we have to cater for twenty, thirty students as well as cater for their needs, we have to cater for their parents too. Parents will ask, why no homework tonight, why your English teacher is lazy, only study, only prepare, no writing part, no writing sentences etc. They will challenge you why your school is no good, no English homework, it's no good, I will complain, I will

			complain. Even some of the parents will complain to the EDB… you know school if you just let them, cut the blue, cut the amount of homework, I think most of the parents will complain about it… All the time for homework, it's great, so please, you, your school give more homework to my children (Peter)
	Schools acknowledge and address parents' expectations and opinions about homework (increase and decrease quantity, awareness of homework quantity and impact on student well-being,)	N/A	every year we send questionnaires to collect parents' opinions if they think "oh I think too much, too much reading comprehension" and then in the next school year, we will cut. If parents also agree, "oh writing is good, then we will keep doing it next year (Winnie) parents complained a lot, even sent some photos to legislative counsellors. They try to show the scores that they oppose the homework policy here and then the, I can see that the parents are really don't know the purpose, but they like to send their

			children here because of a better kind of higher-level curriculum. And school response them by reducing the amount of homework little by little. (Alice) we have got a questionnaire for parents sent out. For parents of more able students they say it is not enough but for average classes its appropriate amount of homework but then for some other classes IRTP or weaker classes, there is too much homework. Actually, it depends on students' abilities and capabilities. This is what they think about the homework. (Mary) I think it's like this, last year the parents in HK said more homework the better so we have more homework but this year the parents say there is too much homework! So that's why we have less homework this year, 2 homework for each subject. (Ann)

			we have got a questionnaire for parents sent out. For parents of more able students they say it is not enough but for average classes its appropriate amount of homework but then for some other classes IRTP or weaker classes, there is too much homework. Actually, it depends on students' abilities and capabilities. This is what they think about the homework. (Jessi)
Societal expectations and culture	(Homework is cultural norm, schools are compared by amount of homework, parents choose schools based on their homework policies and practices, writing is only kind of homework)	This is a normal part of school like in HK It seems to be the culture and non-written requirement in Hong Kong to set homework every day… … Also, it is a norm that teachers need to set homework for students.	And the school expect you so much, the society expect you so much, the exam expects you so much, and you feel like it's your responsibility, because if you don't do it, nobody else will do it right? (Rachel) …unfortunately, in Hong Kong student they have to have a lot of homework compared to some other Western country. I'm not talking about Japan or Korea because we have quite similar culture. so that why I think it's unavoidable and everything is deeply rooted in our tradition and our mind set. I don't know what I'm talking about! Deeply rooted! (Jessi)

			there is a rising issue in Hong Kong, student in Hong Kong are very busy, they need handwork, because too much homework for them. One of my friend's child has 14 pieces of homework in a weekend. There are about 4 pieces of homework like TSA or PS1 homework which are not supported, and they are drilling. They are drilling the format of the exam. Some copying, some project, some e-learning, but I don't think, so they have a lot of homework, no matter easy to do, do not need to spend more time, or don't need to think much, and also the view of homework is that too much for them. but in other aspect, they want children to learn more. There is a dilemma, they cannot supervise them learning out of school. Homework is a tool to at least they are learning they are spending time in doing homework it seems that they are learning. I think this is the problem of how we motivate them to learn but not to do homework without soul. (Chloe)

			Chinese society like doing a lot of homework in written from but they don't believe that also reading is a kind of homework. (Alan)
			most of our parents are alumnus so maybe they love, I don't know how to say, they love the tradition so that's why they send the children to our school…the school is famous for the amount of homework… that is among yuen long schools we have a lot of homework and some parents like this approach and that's why they choose our school (Mary)
			Ah they think, they think it helps learning, it helps them learn better. They think it's a must to do homework and if you…I think they believe if the teacher doesn't give homework, the teacher is lazy. Um…and there are some myths about this and then the, I think they, the teacher is better if they actually mark their homework in detail. (Rachel)

			actually, you should know the status of the school or the level of the school. If I am a very famous school in Wan Chai district, then I need to keep all the students busy. I can call it tailor made homework for them, but you know, in our school, we know our standard, or what the input of our source, ok student source, we just have to keep them, give them enough homework, that's enough, we never compare or compete with other students in the same district. So, for example, ABC school give 10 homework, should we give ten homework, I don't think so. To some extent I can give 20 but is it useful is it meaningful? They can do it they can finish it, or they find it boring or frustrating so afterwards they won't do it anymore (Peter) For my school so I think that my parents are all positive to homework because once they decide to send their kids here, they know there is a lot of homework (Angela)

			some parents choose a school because the reputation that this school gives much homework, this kind of school doesn't give much homework. In our school in the middle or less than middle for homework. So, homework is a part of studying, everyone knows it in Hong Kong and in our culture. (Chloe)
Students' English ability, needs and interests	(students don't like homework, students believe homework helps them, adjust homework to meet learner needs, adjust additional homework based on students' needs, impacts on additional homework and not standard homework)	N/A	If I find my students are particular good in certain areas, 'oh they are very good using e-learning tools, maybe I will design more homework, more homework using the e-tools' (Winnie) It's often, very often in my class, why don't you want to do my homework? is boring. then I will change a little bit, not all, a little bit too fulfils their needs. if they tell me Ah sir the quantity is a lot, can I do five questions less, then I think, I can make an adjustment, so if they say, I don't want to do the writing. I won't promise them not to do it because for me, I think writing is quite, I mean the process writing one is very important for them, they have to practice it, at least they have

			to finish it and do it probably r not and then I can help you. (Peter)
			for some, which is not asked by the school for those pieces of homework, if I think they like it I will ask them to do more, if not I will cancel that homework. (Chloe)
			yes, they play a very important role on helping me decide what to give. And I will because in learning diversity right, in a classroom, I, when I give out homework I am thinking of the best student and the worst students in class. I shouldn't have said that, but I am really thinking of the ability like how they can handle then I am thinking of the balance. Is this homework helping which group of students? And I tend to give homework that benefits most of them so but there are, for example when I give revision homework of penmanship, I know the really capable students don't need it. But when I ask them to make personal notes, I know the least capable students

			can't do it. And then but because I am aware of what different students need so I try to strike a balance within a unit. So, I just make sure they learn the basic thing with lots of practices and consolidations. And then at the same time let the other students have more enjoy learning more. (Rachel)

Influences on Beliefs

Theme	Sub-theme (codes)	Data samples – questionnaire (open-ended)	Data samples – Interview
Teachers' own educational experience	**Found own English homework effective** (Only access to English is school and homework, homework helped them learn English)	N/A	In that period of time, yes, because there wasn't any other way to learn English or some other language. But today you've got internet and you can learn everything before you come to school. But at that time teachers were the only source for me to learn English. Because mums and dads were not educated. So that it's difficult to ask them for help in homework. So that at that time, I would say yes. But nowadays, I don't think it's the case anymore. (Jessi)

| | | | When I was child, everything was very traditional, I don't have task worksheets also the thing homework I had was penmanship, handwriting and grammar exercise … but I think the more practice I have it gave me more confidence so during the exam I got higher marks so that's why I was willing to do exercise. (Mary)

[I assign homework] because when I am at school, teachers give me homework, so that's why when I am a teacher I give homework to students (Ann)

I thought it was something to do that would help me, so it was very useless homework I found. but it really geared you for writing. Just like writing paragraphs, writing stories, I remember in grade one, my teacher told us to write a story and after we wrote it count the number of 'ands' in your story and change them. So, it was very open there was no fill in the blanks with the words or the ideas, it was just focus on |

			one grammar item at a time and you can change at your discretion. (Joan) because my definition is traditional, because, long time ago we did have much other sources, we did not have listening in the internet or we did not have, it was not very popular to read a book and consider it a piece of homework, a long time ago but here we changed, I have one piece of homework like home reading so still, so the belief is from what have learnt when was a child. (Chloe)
	Did not enjoy doing homework	N/A	[I didn't like homework] but I think the more practice I have it gave me more confidence so during the exam I got higher marks so that's why I was willing to do exercise. #00:22:23-3# (Mary) I hated [homework]. I remember in was in a PM so that every day I took the school bus to school and the school bus

			arrived at school quite early, so I hid in the toilet and finished the homework that I hadn't finished the night before. A lot of homework. (Jessi) I don't like it, but I know I have to do it. Yeah ok, to my students, I don't think all of them like to do homework, but they know they have to do it. (Peter)
	Influenced by own teachers' practices (Homework practices today are different from own experience, homework practices similar to own teachers)	N/A	I think the unsupported part was much more than what I give to my students, because I found it very difficult if I think I asked to do but I am very unfamiliar with them so I hated it. So most of the homework I support to my students. (Chloe) when I am at school, teachers give me homework, so that's why when I am a teacher, I give homework to students. (Ann)

			when was young, I was given homework like this way, like when grow up so that literaturally I just follow what might teachers did in the past… I think most of the time this is the case but also like being a teacher then you learn from other teachers, we don't just, I know what you're trying to do here. Basically no one told me how you assign homework, just think and assume this is the best way, this is good and then actually it might be asked someone when was a fresh teacher I gave quite a lot of homework but some other teachers would come to me 'oh I think this a little bit too much' I learnt from the others. #00:17:19-0 (Jessi)
			because of years ago, ok, my primary period the most impressive one is copy book, the others are just the teachers, the teacher writes the sentence on the board and you copy it and then they leave out one to two words and you go home and fill it. This is our homework ok, maybe we call it GE

			homework. nowadays I won't give this kind of homework. to my students. At least I will tell them what to do and lead them how to do it… 'Copying, copying, now I know, the most impressive one was copy book, P1 to P6 I have to copy books, copy books, copy books. Ok, now my handwriting is quite good, but I hate copy book'. (Peter) I think in the past we didn't have so many homework (Angela) I don't know much, I didn't know much about homework at that time, I didn't really have strong feelings at that time, we would just, and Asian right? hahahaha we were taught to be obedient and then we were, we just do what the teacher had assigned, no special feelings… think about my own experience and I think I try not to, I will think about what helped me learn better. And I will think about how it will be better (Rachel)

Professional	**No training on homework**	N/A	No, I didn't, [have a training on giving homework] does that
Development	**practices** (learn from		make me a bad teacher? (Joan)
	colleagues or role)		
			no training, is there training? (Ann)
			No, not at all. Nobody have mention anything like this
			(Rachel)
			I don't have time, for two, I don't really have any training on
			how to set quality or meaningful homework and that's a big
			problem (Jessi)
			I think that question for a long time. I think when I first
			become a teacher I mean the first 1 or 2 years, I really think
			that I get the impression, I get the influence from what I was
			in school, in schools for only in primary secondary. In
			schools you know they affect me to design homework and
			the way to teach because I just, I remember that I tried to use

			my own learning experience to guide the students to learn but once when the time pass and then I get more mature and attend more workshops, and then have more professional knowledge, you will change. You will change especially when, when I became a panel head, and then you have so many tenants, you know co-workers, and then you have to quickly build up yourself lots of things and change. Learn from them and then try to, try to do other things you know. And then change (Angela)
	Received training on designing homework (Importance of quality, exposed to different educational contexts and countries)	N/A	Actually when I was a student at university I was told that I need to design worksheets with quality and not encouraged to give homework like penmanship and handwriting because I think we need to give quality, you need to provide quality, but we need to have quality for homework so we for my experience we have tried to design something like this for students. (Peter)

			When we studied in university, we studied a lot of English language teaching when we got out to see more western countries, how they regard homework. I think they have an impact on me. That's why I think it's important to think outside of the box. Really! And then to see different practices outside so I can really rely on that to my practice…? Maybe when I went to New Zealand. When I had my teaching immersion program, the students in New Zealand need to do a project on some non fiction, like hedgehogs. And then at that time we knew that, I learned that maybe they can do something to do present what they have learned from reading. And then makes it so colorful, make it so lovely. And then there is something that really have a positive impact on me as well because I think when sometimes when we designed homework it's not just black and white, it can be colorful. (Jessi)

			I would say from Monday to Thursday after the teaching I would say they revise what they have learnt and after the lesson. But for me on Friday I would like them to do some leisure like reading books. Because I believe that, this is a good question, like I ask my kids why todays got a lot of homework, because today is Friday. But if you are out of Hong Kong like New Zealand, oh why no homework, because today is Friday. Totally different and I say Chinese society like doing a lot of homework in written from, but they don't believe that also reading is a kind of homework. (Alan)